



Quick Tactics

Monster stat blocks in Fifth Edition are sometimes complicated and have a lot of moving parts. Unless you're an expert at the game, it might be difficult to suss out how they are supposed to be run. I designed this guide to help gamemasters understand the core tactics of Fifth Edition monsters.

The Method

I would be remiss if I didn't pay homage to the master of 5e monster tactics, Keith Ammann, and his website, *The Monsters Know What They're Doing*. A lot of the tactics I use came from learning from the master. So please be sure to check out his books if you haven't already.

I follow a lot of Keith's basic ideas in how monsters operate.

Most creatures want to live.

This is especially true for creatures where death is permanent. Undead, constructs, elementals, and even fiends and celestials, rarely have little to fear from death. All other creatures recognize when they're outmatched, if not at the start of the combat, then during combat, especially when their hit points drop below 50% or fewer.

Double down on strengths.

Most creatures have one or two statistics that stand out from the pack. Most living creatures know how to use their attacks to benefit themselves. An insect whose strongest attack is its jaws knows to use its jaws. Similarly, a goblin with high Dexterity will rely on its Stealth and ranged attacks long before it gets into battle.

Mitigate weaknesses.

Just as a creature will double down on its strengths, it's going to do what it can to mitigate its weaknesses. If a creature has

Credits

The following creators made this adventure possible:

Design and Writing. DMDave

Art. Darryl T. Jones, Nacho Lazaro, Paper Forge, Pavel Kunc, Tithi Luadthong

low AC, it will find cover. If a monster has poor strength and low hit points, it won't engage in melee. And so on.

Use the terrain.

Nearly all creatures will be in terrain that benefits them. This is even true of lower-intelligence creatures. After all, a creature that lives somewhere that doesn't benefit it doesn't survive long. Unless the creature itself is lost or a prisoner, chances are it will have itself set to fight foes that come its way at home.

Pair with complementary creatures.

One of the best ways for a creature to mitigate its weaknesses is to team up with creatures whose strengths match the creature's weaknesses. For example, a weak kobold will use ogres to serve as tanks so they can fire from afar. Or a will-o'-wisp works well with banshees because banshees can drop creatures to 0 hit points with one move.

CR 5 Creatures

To continue this series, I want to focus on CR 5 creatures. They usually work well both as bosses for Tier 1 characters as well as regular encounters or minions for parties in Tier 2 and potentially 3. Thus, they can be encountered during a wide level range and are useful for a long time. Some of my all-time favorite creatures are CR 5.



Air Elemental

Air elementals are one of the four elemental types featured in the main Fifth Edition monster book. They're a great challenge for later Tier 1 and practically all of Tier 2. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **They are servants on the material plane.** According to the fluff, elementals do not have a form unless they're summoned to the material plane. This means that they're usually working for someone.
2. **Air elementals are fast.** As one might expect, air elementals have incredible Dexterity and a dazzling flight speed. Likely, they start combat in the sky above the characters or up to 90 feet away.
3. **They have ape-like intelligence.** Although air elementals are sentient creatures, they are only as smart as apes, so they likely won't grasp complicated tactics.
4. **Air elementals are total brutes.** They first try to nab as many enemies as they can with their Whirlwind, then switch to slam attacks while their Whirlwind charges.
5. **Air elementals fight until destroyed.** As summoned creatures, air elementals fight until the last hit point. They have no fear of death as death simply sends them back to the Elemental Plane of Air.

Barbed Devil

Barbed devils are the first real "devil bosses" Tier 1 and Tier 2 characters might face. They're used as guards for high-ranked devils, too. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **They're hard to surprise.** Barbed devils have darkvision out to 120 ft. and a passive Perception score of 18. It's pretty hard to get the drop on them, and low-level rogues hoping to get by on just their ability to hide might find fighting them difficult.
2. **Barbed devils are deal-makers.** With a Deception and Insight both at +5, barbed devils are negotiators. They're pretty clever, too, with above-average Intelligence and Wisdom.
3. **They thrive in magical darkness and fire.** Thanks to their ability to see through magical darkness and immunity to fire, the barbed devil's ideal fighting area will include both features.
4. **Hurl flame from a distance.** Barbed devils have a hurl flame attack that deals an average of 10 damage per hit with a fantastic range of 150 ft. With this kind of range, barbed devils will try to keep at least 60 feet between themselves and their targets, and constantly move and take cover when it can. This flame attack ignites objects, so it might try to burn down things around the characters, too.
5. **Dash away from melee attackers.** Barbed devils might have good melee attacks, but they do best when they're far away from their enemies. With 110 hit points and plenty of damage resistances, they won't mind shedding a few hit points from opportunity attacks just to put some distance between themselves and their enemies.
6. **Devils don't fear death on the material.** Summoned devils don't die when they hit 0 but instead, return to Hell. Therefore, they fight to the last hit point.



Bulette

Bulettes are giant, armored predators that are like a cross between a mole, shark, and a tank. With bestial intelligence, they're pretty straightforward. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **Bulettes are voracious and aggressive.** Bulettes don't take too much time to consider what they're attacking before they attack it. Pretty much any creature that's Large or smaller that triggers its tremorsense is fair game.
2. **Bulettes surprise with their burrow.** Because bulettes spend most of their time burrowing underground, it is likely they'll surprise targets first. Assume that any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 11 or less is surprised during the first round of combat. All other characters sense the vibrations before they appear.
3. **Bulettes leap.** A bulette opens combat by charging and leaping, trying to get as many creatures as it can in a single leap.
4. **Bulettes bite.** After they attack with the leap, the bulette attacks with its bite, targeting whatever creature got knocked prone with its leap.
5. **Bulettes flee when injured.** When the bulette's hit points drop below 50% or more, it digs back into the earth and escapes. It might be dumb, but it's got enough sense to escape from dangerous prey.

Earth Elemental

Earth elementals are one of the four elemental types featured in the main Fifth Edition monster book. They're a great challenge for later Tier 1 and practically all of Tier 2. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **They are servants on the material plane.** According to the fluff, elementals do not have a form unless they're summoned to the material plane. This means that they're usually working for someone.
2. **Earth elementals burrow.** Not only can an earth elemental dig through ground, but it doesn't disturb material while it moves through it. That means it can probably surprise creatures. If the earth elemental pops out of the ground, assume that any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 13 or lower is surprised.
3. **They have ape-like intelligence.** Although earth elementals are sentient creatures, they are only as smart as apes, so they likely won't grasp complicated tactics.
4. **Earth elementals are total brutes.** Earth elementals have one mode: beat your face. They slam slam slam, targeting whatever seems to be the biggest threat to them.
5. **Earth elementals fight until destroyed.** As summoned creatures, earth elementals fight until the last hit point. They have no fear of death as death simply sends them back to the Elemental Plane of Earth.



Fire Elemental

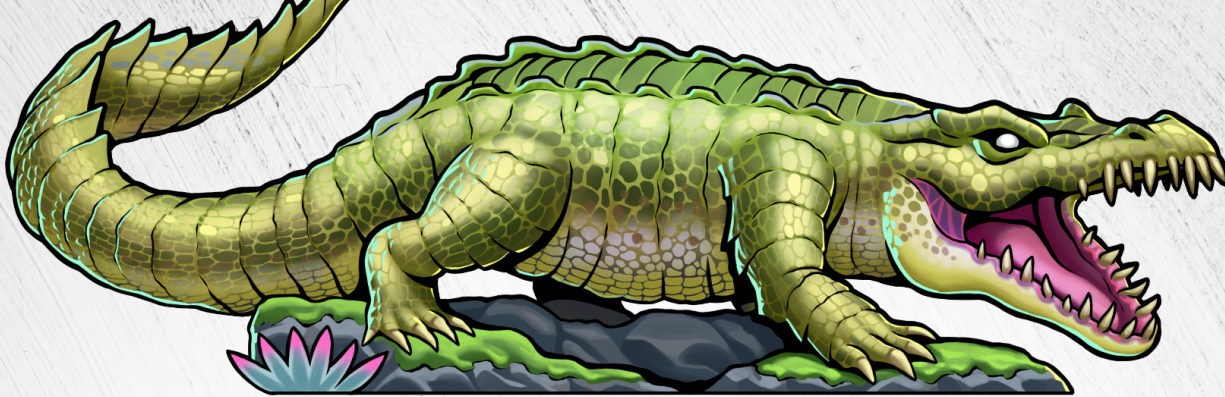
I freakin' love fire elementals. In fact, they're my favorite of the core four from the 5e monster book. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **They are servants on the material plane.** According to the fluff, elementals do not have a form unless they're summoned to the material plane. This means that they're usually working for someone.
2. **Burn and run.** Fire elementals are fast, they constantly burn, and they're resistant to almost all forms of damage. Have them move every turn, running through as many heroes as they can (don't forget that they take up a 10-by-10-foot area). Every hero they pass catches fire just from its touch, which forces them to use their action to douse the flames.
3. **Hit as they go.** As the fire elemental runs through enemies, setting them ablaze, it also makes touch attacks against especially flammable looking creatures—particularly those wearing loose clothing such as robes (hint hint). This attack *also* sets creatures on fire.
4. **Afraid of water.** While a fire elemental isn't afraid of death, its natural aversion to water—and the pain that it causes it—is probably enough to deter them from large bodies of water, rain, etc.
5. **No fear of death.** As summoned creatures, fire elementals fight until the last hit point. They have no fear of death as death simply sends them back to the elemental plane of fire.

Flesh Golem

Flesh golems, like other golems, are relatively straightforward brutes. However, they have a few features that make them stand out from the crowd. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **Flesh golems are servant constructs.** Nearly all constructs are driven by internal instructions. This usually means they have little regard for their own selves. Flesh golems are marginally wiser than the other golems, which means they probably put a little thought toward self-preservation.
2. **Flesh golems have ape-like intelligence.** A flesh golem doesn't really plan its tactics. It marches forward and attacks with its fists until it's destroyed or goes berserk.
3. **They're afraid of fire.** 'FIRE BAD!' If a golem sees a fire or takes fire damage, it backs off immediately. This is one of the few things that make it more "human" than other types of golems.
4. **They go berserk.** If a flesh golem drops to 40 hit points or less, there's a chance it goes berserk. Really, this isn't too different from its normal tactics—beat whatever it can with its fists—but if its creator is somewhere nearby, they can get them to calm down.
5. **Pair with lightning spells and effects.** Flesh golems heal when they take lightning damage. Pair them with effects that cause lightning damage, such as blue dragons or spellcasters with the lightning spell, or electrified floors (this happens in Mad Mage).



Giant Crocodile

Crocodiles are lovely little monsters that actually have some fun tactics. The giant versions are true beasts, capable of killing even 5th-level heroes. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **Crocodiles are stealthy and patient.** Crocodiles have proficiency in Stealth, which means they prefer to sneak up on their prey. As creatures that can hold their breath for 15 minutes, they probably sneak up in muddy or otherwise dark water.
2. **Giant crocodiles get multiattack.** The giant croc probably opens with its tail, knocking its target prone, then switches to its bite. They aren't smart enough to discern weaker-looking creatures (all Medium creatures look the same to it), but it might go for Small creatures first.
3. **Crocodiles bite and autograpple.** One of the things that make crocodiles so dangerous is their auto-grapple that comes with their bite. The giant croc's bite restrains, too.
4. **Crocodiles bite and drown.** After one successfully bites a creature, it pulls it back into the water. From there, it continues to make bite attacks against the same creature. It swims 50 feet, so it moves 25 feet while it's grappling. Pretty quick! Likely, they prefer relatively deep bodies of water, so they'll swim to the bottom forcing the other heroes to dive in after it. This gives the croc advantage in underwater combat and slows down characters without a swim speed.
5. **Crocodiles flee when injured.** Although they're not wise enough to recognize a big threat in advance, they do have enough sense to flee when their hit points drop to 50% or fewer.

Giant Shark

Cue Jaws theme. Here are some tactics for giant sharks.

1. **Giant sharks have primitive Intelligence.** As giant fish, giant sharks have zero tactical knowledge. They look for something good to bite and bite it. It might be a boat. It might be a foot. They're not picky.
2. **Bite bleeding things.** Giant sharks are drawn by blood, and they get advantage on attack rolls against bleeding creatures. These are the only "tactics" they'll use. Once they successfully bite something, they keep trying to bite it 'til that thing is dead or, rather, eaten.
3. **Flee when their hit points drop to 50% or fewer.** Sharks aren't terribly wise, but they're wise enough to know when their dinner won't come easy. As soon as they drop to half their hit points or fewer, they swim away.

Gladiator

Gladiators are an NPC that more or less represents a high-level fighter or barbarian (minus rage). With some awesome action economy and great hit points, they're wonderful Tier 1 bosses and even Tier 2 troubles. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **Trained fighters.** Gladiators aren't bumbling guards or commoners. They're trained killers and are pretty dangerous. If they enter a fight, it's with the intent to kill. And they're wise enough to know when they're up against a formidable opponent.
2. **Intimidate first.** A good or neutral aligned gladiator might first try to convince the party to back away, using its decent Intimidation to do so. If it's before a crowd (it is a gladiator after all), it will use its Intimidation to incite more cheers.
3. **Melee fighter.** Gladiators can throw their spears, but their Brute trait and shield bash work best when in close range. It will only use its spear as a thrown weapon if it can't close its distance.
4. **Keep distance and Ready a shield bash.** The gladiator opens the fight defensively, readying a shield bash against any target that comes near, especially if that target is just before it in initiative order. Once the target gets near, the gladiator shield bashes to knock the target down. The target won't be able to stand because it used half of its movement to close distance. This means the attacker's attacks will be at disadvantage.
5. **Spear downed opponent and move.** If the gladiator gets the shield bash off with its ready action, it then switches to its spear and makes three one-handed attacks with it against the downed opponent, all with advantage. If all goes well, it'll deal approximately 33 damage to the target. It then moves more than 20 feet away from the target. That way, when the target stands back up, it won't be able to close the distance again.
6. **Take cover against ranged attackers.** If there are ranged players on the field like spellcasters and rogues, the gladiator tries to take cover. It can't use its parry against ranged fighters. It also makes sure it doesn't get distracted by melee opponents (so as not to draw sneak attacks).
7. **Flee or surrender when hit points drop to 30% or lower.** While the gladiator is wise enough to know when it's defeated, it's also a performer. It only surrenders when its hit points fall below 30%.

Gorgon

The gorgon is easily one of the most dangerous CR 5 creatures as it is capable of blasting the entire party with a petrification blast. Here are some tactics for these animalistic brutes.

1. **It's a predator.** According to the fluff, a gorgon is a predator that eats petrified creatures. It will attack a party in hopes to grab one or two to eat.
2. **Trample or petrify.** If there is 30 feet or more distance between the gorgon and its enemies, it charges and tramples first, potentially knocking a target prone.
3. **Switch to petrifying breath.** Once the gorgon is in the midst of a group of targets, it uses its Petrifying Breath to leave the playing field.
4. **Gore restrained targets.** Any target that fails the initial saving throw against the gorgon's breath becomes a target for its horns. Bonus if it can get another trampling charge against it.
5. **Flee when it takes 50% damage or more.** If the gorgon's hit points drop below half, it flees. It's a predator, but it's wise enough to know when it needs to get the hell out of Dodge.

Night Hag

Night hags are among the most dangerous (and truly awful) creatures in the cosmology. Here are some tactics for them (sans coven). Note that these tactics are primarily roleplaying and plot-based, as night hags, in my opinion—and some of my colleagues—are not ones to fight tough heroes themselves.

1. **Stage one: deny and isolate.** A night hag loves turning virtue into villainy more than anything, and won't let its own petty ego get in the way of that. Instead of making itself seem bigger than it is, it feigns weakness and denies its true power. While doing this with a potential danger before it, it readies either its *plane shift* spell (if it's in the Outer Planes) or ability to turn ethereal (if it's in the Prime Material or Inner Planes). If it can't escape, it turns aggressive. If ethereal, it might follow the characters for a bit to learn what it can about them for later use.
2. **Stage two: anger.** Next, the night hag turns aggressive. It opens with threats, reminding the heroes that it's a fiend and nearly immortal. Destroying it will have no effect, so they'd be foolish to try. It then speaks of its ability to gather information and harm the characters where it hurts the most—their friends, family, and other loved ones. If they temporarily destroy it and interrupt whatever plans it has, it will make it its mission to haunt their lives for as long as they should live (and possibly beyond).
3. **Stage three: bargaining.** If the night hag can't escape easily and its threats won't work, it switches to bargaining. It will offer something minor in its possession—potentially information it has on a foe or ally of the characters—in exchange for its freedom. Of course, it will still bear a grudge against them.

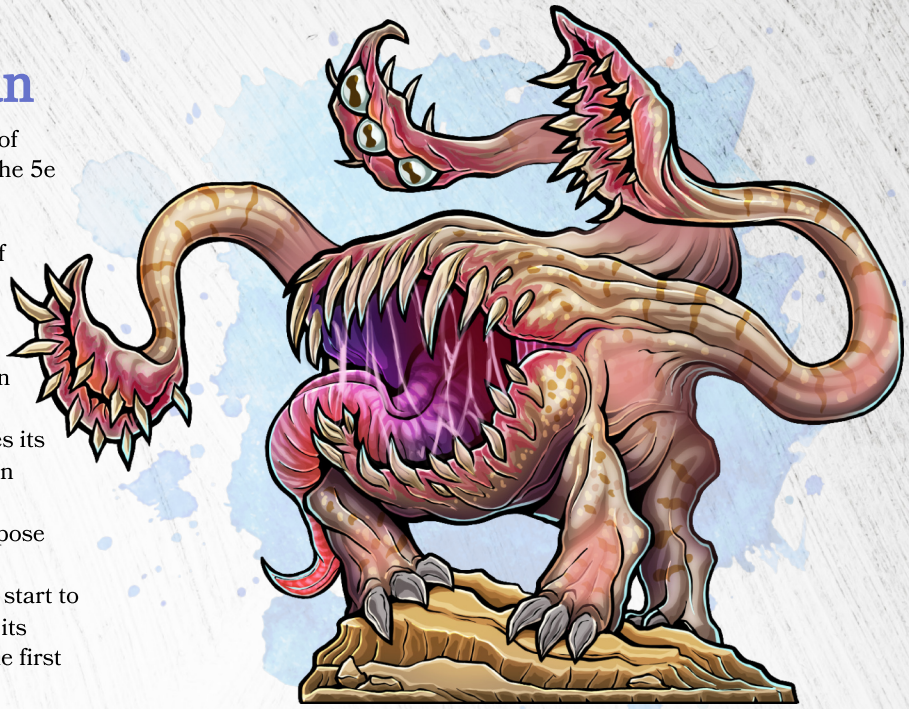
4. **Stage four: depression.** When bargaining won't let the night hag flee, it resorts to begging. This is an absolute last resort for the night hag. Above all, it wants to create more chaos, and if the characters are determined to destroy her—and she has no possible way of escape—and she's caught somewhere she's trapped, such as her home plane or a demiplane like Ravenloft, she has no choice but to beg. Keep in mind that this is really going to piss her off and whatever threats she promised, she'll deliver ten-fold.
5. **Stage five: acceptance.** Finally, when nothing else works, the night hag fights. But it's very important to understand that this is an absolute last resort. She has no interest in fighting. When fighting, she mostly uses her claws against the weakest-looking targets that are within reach. Spellcasters who keep their distance she targets with *magic missile*, especially if those spellcasters are concentrating on effects preventing her escape. And if she is not on her home plane, she has no fear of death. She simply reforms in her home plane (usually Hades or Gehenna).



Half-Red Dragon Veteran

Half Dragon is a template you can add to any number of creatures. In this case, I'm using the veteran that's in the 5e monster book. Here are some tactics for it.

1. **Fight in the dark.** Since half-dragons get 10 feet of blindsight, they work great in magical darkness and other fully obscured areas (like *fog cloud*, or *cloudkill* if they're a half-green dragon).
2. **Start with range and take cover.** A half-red dragon veteran is primarily a melee fighter, but if there's significant distance between it and its enemy, it uses its heavy crossbow to pop off a single shot each turn. In between shots, it takes cover behind full cover (if available). If it can't take cover, it drops prone to impose disadvantage on ranged attacks against it.
3. **Dodge until enemies come close.** When enemies start to get close to it (within 20-30 feet), the veteran grabs its melee weapons and takes the Dodge action until the first enemy comes in range.
4. **Melee attacks.** As soon as the enemy reaches the half-dragon, it lays into it with its three melee attacks per turn.
5. **Fire breath against multiple attackers.** If the half-red dragon gets surrounded by a group of attackers, it switches to its fire breath, but only if there are at least three targets it can hit with it. Otherwise, it relies on its swords.



Roper

Ropers are one of my favorite creatures. Not only are they super strong in combat, but they're pretty dang weird. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **Ropers surprise.** Unless the party has some sort of trait or magic item that prevents things from surprising them, ropers usually get to surprise with their False Appearance feature. Just to be nice (especially against low Tier 2 parties), you might want to signal that there's one nearby. "There's a big stalagmite/stalactite surrounded by bones" and so forth.
2. **If it sees it, it inspects it, then it attacks.** Ropers have 60 feet of darkvision and a 50-foot reach. However, they're extremely wise. They don't move much, so likely they can go a while without a meal—if well-armed, heavily armored heroes happen by, they might just remain still and let them pass without too much thought. Although, that halfling at the end sure does look tasty...
3. **Upside down ropers.** For added fun, stick a roper on the ceiling of a cavern that's 30-50 feet high. This allows it to drop and smash pesky heroes who refuse to die.
4. **Pair with other "calcium deposit monsters."** Ropers work especially well with things like piercers and darkmantles which also gain False Appearance when they look like cave formations. Reserve such encounters for higher Tier 2 characters or even Tier 3.
5. **Ropers are wise.** Ropers have a remarkable 16 Wisdom. If they don't think they're getting an easy meal, they immediately back away. They lack a language, but have Intelligence 7, which means they can make sounds (probably weird moaning) and crawl backwards while cowering/Dodging, using their tendrils to shrug like, "My bad. My bad. Carry on."

Otyugh

This unpronounceable beastie is often found in fantasy city sewers chewing on poop and slime. Despite their somewhat bestial nature and off-putting appearance, otyughs are actually somewhat intelligent. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **Otyughs hide in filth.** According to their fluff, otyughs are known to hide in piles of funk with only their eyestalk showing. Think the thing in the trash compactor in *Star Wars: A New Hope*. The locations in which it hides are relatively dark.
2. **Otyughs try to surprise.** When a creature worth eating walks within 10 feet of a hidden otyugh, it attacks with its tentacles. It gets two such tentacle attacks and a third attack saved for its bite. The otyugh's tentacle attack description doesn't have a "real" effect, but I assume it can use its tentacles to pull things to its mouth. The bite delivers a disease that poisons the target.
3. **Slam until the target is dead.** After the otyugh auto-grabs creatures with its tentacles, it slams them onto solid surfaces, doing so until the thing stops moving. It then pulls it close and eats it.
4. **Otyughs flee when their hit points drop to half.** Otyughs flee or cower when they lose 50% or more of their hit points. They even have limited telepathy—and a language!—with which they can beg for their lives. An otyugh might barter with useful information in exchange for its life.

Salamander

Salamanders are fire-snake monsters from the Elemental Plane of Fire. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **They're drawn to fire.** Salamanders love setting things on fire, and likely do so using their heated weapons and bodies. Expect to encounter these folks in deadly environments like volcanoes and forest fires where they're immune to the fire itself.
2. **Auto-grapple with tail.** Salamander tail attacks auto-grapple and also restrain. Not only does this give the salamander and other creatures advantages on attack rolls against the target, but it allows the salamander to auto-hit the target with its tail attack, too.
3. **Drag through dangerous terrain.** Once the salamander has a target grappled with its tail, not only will it attack the creature with its tail (automatic hit) and its spear (with advantage), but it'll pull the target into fires, lava, or whatever else it can to weaken it. It might even take the Dodge action while it drags a creature like this, using the terrain to do all the heavy lifting. Remember that when grappling, the salamander's movement speed becomes 15 feet, so keep such terrain nearby.
4. Elementals in the prime material don't die. If encountered in the prime material, a salamander doesn't die when it's destroyed, but instead reforms in its home plane. As such, salamanders have little fear of destruction—if anything, they find it annoying.

Shambling Mound

Another favorite creature of mine, shambling mounds are big hunks of animated vegetation that really want to drown and eat you. These are some tactics for these fun monsters.

1. **Surprise attacks.** Shambling mounds hide among rotting vegetation and murky water. They have blindsight out to 60 feet plus expertise in Stealth. This means that they wait for a target to come by, then try to surprise them. If successful, this should grant them as an unseen attacker advantage on their first attack.
2. **Slam, slam, engulf.** Shambling mounds have a powerful multiattack that allows them to slam twice. Then, if both slams hit the same target, the target is grappled and the mound can engulf it, restraining it and choking it.
3. **Drown the son-of-a-gun.** Once the shambling mound has a hold of its target, it drags it back into the muck where it hopes to drown the target and keep it from its allies.
4. **Pair with lightning damage dealers.** Shambling mounds regain hit points when they take lightning damage. Pair them with creatures or effects that deal lightning damage. Will-o-wisps are a particularly clever combination. If the shambling mound successfully chokes out a target, it drops to 0 hit points. The wisp can then eat the target. In exchange for this free meal, the wisp keeps the mound alive with frequent lightning zaps.

Troll

Trolls are a Fifth Edition staple. Not too smart or wise, they're pretty straightforward. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **Trolls are reckless.** Without a whole lot of Intelligence or Wisdom, trolls attack without putting too much thought into it. Their stomach does all the thinking for them.
2. **Trolls smell their enemies coming.** Trolls have an exceptional sense of smell, allowing them to detect their targets coming from a distance. This lets them prepare an ambush—not a good ambush, mind you, but an ambush nonetheless. Likely, they attack mostly at night or in dark places.
3. **Trolls fight like brutes.** There isn't a whole lot of finesse to a troll's attack. They attack with their claws twice and bite once. They attack whatever is closest, although fire may deter it from attacking particular targets.
4. **They flee when they take fire damage.** Although a troll isn't wise enough to know when it's about to die, it does know “fire bad.” If a troll takes fire or acid damage, its Regeneration ceases to function, and it flees.
5. **Trolls might fight in the rain.** Although trolls aren't very smart, they might have enough sense to fight in the rain. Not only will this diminish burns that they might take, but their sense of smell won't be hindered by the downpour, whereas their prey will have disadvantage to their senses of sight and hearing.



Unicorn

Unicorns hold the distinction of being the lowest CR monster in the official Fifth Edition material that has legendary actions and regional effects. Here are some tactics for these classic fantasy creatures.

1. **Unicorns are usually good-aligned.** A unicorn isn't interested in jumping into a fight, especially when it can diffuse a situation through conversation. They have strong Wisdom scores and Charisma scores—good Insight and Persuasion. And they have *calm emotions*.
2. **Masters of stealth.** Unicorns can cast *pass without trace* at will and, while in a region containing their lair, they have advantage on Stealth checks. This means that their effective bonus to Dexterity (Stealth) checks is +17.
3. **Support creatures.** A lone unicorn will fight, but a unicorn paired with other good-aligned creatures will serve as support. They do this with their healing touch, shimmering shield, and teleport actions, as well as its *dispel evil and good* and *pass without trace* spells.
4. **Open with control effects.** If peace isn't an option and a unicorn has no choice but to fight, it targets enemies with *entangle*, hoping to slow down enemies.
5. **Charge and kick.** The unicorn's multiattack allows it to attack with its hooves and horn. It starts with a charge, moving 20 or more feet, then hits with its horn, hoping to knock its target prone. From there, it attacks with its hooves, ideally with advantage.
6. **Flee when the odds are against it.** Unicorns are wise enough to know when a battle probably won't go in their favor, even before the battle begins. As soon as things look bad, it teleports away, taking up to three allies with it.

Vampire Spawn

Vampire spawn serve two purposes in Fifth Edition. First, they are minions to greater vampires. Second, they are low-level vampires that can fight against high Tier 1 parties and even Tier 2 parties. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **Vampire spawn are stealthy.** Vampire spawn have a +6 bonus to their Stealth checks and can Spider Climb. If they have a chance, they will try to surprise the party.
2. **Vampire spawn are skirmishers.** Fast, tough, and capable of regeneration, vampire spawn use hit-and-run tactics. They move, attack with their claws, then escape into full cover, potentially exiting through an open window or some other out-of-the-way area.
3. **Vampire spawn fear clerics and paladins.** More so than any other class, clerics and paladins are capable of dealing the most damage to a vampire spawn. If a vampire spawn takes radiant damage, damage from holy water, or is turned, it flees. Although they aren't super wise, they're wise enough to know when they can be killed.
4. **With no radiant damage, vampire spawn are extremely deadly.** Without the presence of a character that can deal radiant damage, vampire spawn are very difficult to fight. They continue their hit-and-run tactics, occasionally fleeing to regenerate their hit points. Ultimately, they are pursuit predators, and will continue to haunt the party throughout the night.

Water Elemental

Water elementals are one of the four elemental types featured in the main Fifth Edition monster book. They're a great challenge for later Tier 1 and practically all of Tier 2. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **They are servants on the material plane.** According to the fluff, elementals do not have a form unless they're summoned to the material plane. This means that they're usually working for someone.
2. **They are incredible swimmers.** Water elementals have an amazing swim speed of 90 feet. This makes them excellent guardians in watery areas where they are protected both by their mobility and the normal disadvantages imposed by underwater combat.
3. **Water elementals whelm and drown.** The water elemental's Whelm attack charges every other round. They will open with this, targeting as many creatures as they can with intent to grapple and restrain. From there, they try to drown those captured by it.
4. **Slam restrained targets.** Once the water elemental has a target restrained and drowning, it uses its slam against those targets until they stop fighting.
5. **Water elementals fight until destroyed.** As summoned creatures, water elementals fight until the last hit point. They have no fear of death as death simply sends them back to the Elemental Plane of Water.



Werebear

Werebears are one of the five lycanthropes featured in the Fifth Edition monster book, and they are typically “good” creatures. Regardless, here are some cool tactics for them.

1. **Werebears are relatively wise.** Although werebears are tough and can hold their own in 99% of the fights they come across, they are wise enough to know when to talk their way out of a fight, too. A minor boost to Charisma also tells me that they’re probably decent negotiators.
2. **Avoid silver weapons and magic.** Werebears are one of the lowest CR monsters with immunity to nonmagical weapons. Unless carrying a magic weapon is common in your world, they have little to fear from most encounters—including against low-level adventurers. However, if someone presents a magic or silver weapon, they may reconsider the attack, recognizing their own disadvantage.
3. **Attack magic/silver weapon wielders and spellcasters.** If the werebear does find itself matched against spellcasters or warriors with magic or silver weapons, it seeks to neutralize those people first.
4. **Don’t shapechange in combat.** Not only does shapechanging during combat eat up an action, but it reveals that they’re shapechangers. Most werecreatures are clever enough to know they have an advantage against their target if the target isn’t aware of their true nature (and weaknesses).
5. **Hurt enough to scare off enemies.** If combat begins, the werebear does enough damage to scare away attackers. Since it’s a melee attacker and good-natured, it will probably only deal non-lethal damage. If it’s in bear form and wants to keep up the pretense, it flees after it disables its attackers. Otherwise, it warns them to stop before it kills them.



Wraith

Wraiths are one of the first spooky boss-level undead characters will encounter in Fifth Edition adventures. Although they’re not nearly as terrifying as they were in previous editions (level-drain, anyone?), they’re still pretty heinous. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **Wraiths are smart, wise, and charismatic.** Unlike their specter minions, wraiths are actually intelligent creatures capable of conversation. Plus, they’re wise enough to recognize a danger when they see it—namely clerics and paladins. Although they are driven by a desire to eradicate life, they may pause to negotiate/intimidate before they rush to attack.
2. **Use their incorporeality and flight.** Wraiths are not bound by the same obstacles as their enemies. As soon as a wraith attacks, it should flee through a wall, floor, or even the ceiling, granting itself total cover. And because it is resistant to almost all forms of damage, it has little to fear from attacks of opportunity.
3. **Target weak-looking enemies.** Wraiths perform best against characters with poor Constitution saves: every class except for barbarians, fighters, and sorcerers. They likely target clerics first, since clerics can turn them and deal radiant damage. However, they may avoid paladins and their smites.
4. **Draw out paladins.** If there is a paladin in the group and the wraith is bound and determined to eradicate the other members of the party, have the wraith draw the paladin away from the group by moving 35 feet or more each round and taking the Dodge action. Then, when it has the paladin far enough away from the rest of the party, the wraith charges the rest of the group.
5. **They flee when their hit points drop to 50% or less, they take significant radiant damage, or they come into contact with natural sunlight.** A wraith’s desire to eradicate all living things is enough to push it to save itself when its hit points drop to 50% or fewer or if it takes a single powerful hit dealing radiant damage, such as a *guiding bolt* or paladin’s smite. The wraith will flee through the nearest solid surface it can, hoping its enemies won’t follow.

Wight

Wights are some of the first intelligent undead that characters will encounter in the game. Wights are simultaneously possessed of free will and compelled to do the bidding of the evil creatures who raise them from the dead. Here are some tactics for them.

1. **Pair with poisoners and grapplers.** As undead, wights are immune to poison. Furthermore, they are excellent ranged fighters who fear hits only from silver and magic weapons. Use grapplers or difficult terrain to keep distance between foes. And use light sources (possibly even a flaming arrow) to light up enemies in the dark so they can maintain the maximum normal range for their longbows.
2. **Wights possess above-average Wisdom.** Unless compelled to do so, a wight won't rush into an attack before it considers its options. As Intelligent creatures, they're capable of carrying on a conversation. But they are evil, so they will likely only do so for twisted reasons.
3. **Wights rely on stealth.** As creatures that shun the light and prefer dark places, wights use their Stealth to scope out their targets and lay ambushes.
4. **They use their longbows to soften up foes.** Wights use longbows and get to attack twice with them. If the targets have sources of light, they can use the target's own light source as a beacon for the full normal range of its longbow attacks, never getting too close. Otherwise, they stay 50 to 60 feet away, right at the far end of its darkvision.
5. **Draw out melee fighters.** Melee fighters who attempt to close the distance with the wight are falling right into its trap. The wight dips into full cover from ranged attackers who keep their distance, then waits in hiding with a Dodge or Hide until the attacker approaches. Once the attacker makes contact, the wight attacks with its longsword and Life Drain attacks, hoping to weaken the target, all the while keeping cover between itself and the ranged attackers.
6. **Wights fear silver, magic, and sunlight.** Wights, like most creatures, flee when they take 50% damage or more. They are also weak against magic attacks and silver, and they receive penalties from being in direct sunlight. The only thing that would keep a wight from fleeing would be if it was compelled by its master to press on with its fight. While it enjoys draining life, it won't do so at risk to itself.

Xorn

Xorn are one of my favorite 5e monsters because, well... they're just so darn weird. They're basically rock-covered barrels with three legs, three arms, three eyes, and one big mouth. And all they really like to do is eat gems. Here are some tactics for these weirdos.

1. **Xorn are relatively peaceful.** Despite their off-putting appearance, xorn are neutral creatures of decent intelligence. They can talk, and some might even learn how to speak Common.

2. **Xorn want your treasure.** A xorn can sense gems and gold within 60 feet of it. Since they treat solid matter as "water," they can probably even smell it through the ground.
3. **Xorn can surprise.** Although they are relatively slow, a xorn can move through solid earth like it was water thanks to its Earth Glide ability. This means that unless the characters have a power or magic item that alerts them to dangers or they possess tremorsense, a hungry xorn is likely get the drop on them. And if that doesn't work, xorn also get advantage on Stealth checks made to hide in rocky areas.
4. **A fed xorn is a friendly xorn.** I usually run xorn like bears, where so long as they're fed, they're happy. And because xorn are intelligent, they might even offer up some useful advice for travelers.
5. **Xorn fight like whirling dervishes.** Xorn have resistance to most attacks and a crazy high AC. They're not too worried about jumping straight into combat. Once there, they start to attack like crazy, swinging with their arms and biting with their big mouths. They only possess average Intelligence and Wisdom, so likely won't target a creature specifically unless that target is the one carrying the loot or it's the one doing the most damage.
6. **Xorns are elementals.** A xorn in the prime material plane has nothing to worry about when it comes to death—it simply reforms on the Elemental Plane of Earth. The only thing that might make it back down from a fight is the potential to eat more gems. Ω



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