



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.

Credits

The following creators made this adventure possible:

Design and Writing. DMDave

Art. Paper Forge, Tithi Luadthong

Mitigate weaknesses.

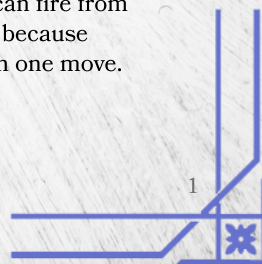
Just as a creature will double down on its strengths, it's going to do what it can to mitigate its weaknesses. If a creature has low AC, it will find cover. If a monster has poor strength and low hit points, it won't engage in melee. And so on.

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 1/8 Creatures

To kick this series off, I want to first take a look at CR 1/8 creatures. Even though most of them have only a handful of hit points, rather low damage output, you can still do a lot of interesting things with them as I show below.

Bandit

Bandits are a classic Fifth Edition "humanoid" villain.

1. **Stand, shoot, drop.** Bandits have lousy AC but decent Dexterity. Have them fight at a range of at least 50 or more feet from the party (still within 80 feet) and put them behind cover. Also, have them drop prone after they fire their crossbow. Cover grants a +2 bonus to AC (or +5 if it's three-quarters) and ranged attacks against prone attackers are at disadvantage. Now the bandit's AC is "effectively" 19 (half cover) to 22 (three-quarters cover).
2. **Move and reposition.** When a character tries to get close to the bandit, have them move up to 30 feet away (or 15 feet if they're prone) and find another spot to snipe from using the same range and cover tactics above. The goal is to always keep one round of movement between them and melee attackers.
3. **Spread them out.** Bandits are pretty cheap at 25 XP cost, so you can use lots of them. Just make sure you don't clump them up. When possible, place them 15 feet or more apart from each other to avoid big boom attacks from spellcasters.
4. **Use traps in their ambushes.** Drop a burning tree in the road, a pit trap, or some other distraction so they can surround their targets.



Blood Hawk

Blood hawks are perpetually pissed-off birds that tend to fight in groups.

1. **Bumrush targets.** Although blood hawks don't have proficiency in Stealthy, they still have killer flight speed of 60 feet and decent Dexterity. Plus, they can spot targets from far away thanks to Keen Sight. A flock of these buggers will scout the land looking for easy targets, then swoop in for an attack. Chances are, enemies won't realize they're being attacked until they're actually getting hit.
2. **Outnumber opponents.** As a relatively wise creature with Pack Tactics, blood hawks will never challenge something larger than them without having at least a 2:1 advantage, unless they are absolutely desperate.
3. **Attack relentlessly.** Blood hawks will fight for as long as they can until either the enemy is defeated or their numerical advantage drops below 1:1.

Camel

If the characters get into a fight with a camel, they've probably done something horribly wrong (or they're bored).

1. **Camels aren't wise or smart.** Thanks to incredibly poor Intelligence and Wisdom scores, a camel will pick a fight with a bigger and more dangerous foe without any thought to its own well-being.
2. **They are brutes.** There's no finesse when it comes to a camel. They're all muscle and brawn, and prefer to fight with their bite—to which, oddly, they don't add their Strength modifier.
3. **Camels fight until they're nearly dead.** With its low Wisdom, a camel doesn't know when to stop biting. It's not until its hit points get down to 30% or fewer will it say, "Maybe I should run now?" at which point it dashes away with no thought to Disengage.

Cultist

Next to bandits, cultists are one of the most iconic Fifth Edition bad humanoid guys at CR 1/8. Here is how to run them in combat.

1. **They are social foes.** Cultists have decent Deception. This means you're likely to meet a cultist and never realize that they're actually a cultist. They might even use this to get close and stab you in the back.
2. **Cultists fight in large groups.** Cultists are wise enough to know which fights to pick and which fights not to. They probably fight in groups where they outnumber foes 2:1, believing they have strength in numbers. Otherwise, a lone cultist will likely flee or at least try to surprise its foe.
3. **When commanded, cultists fight until killed.** Cultists have Dark Devotion, which means that they have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened. This also means that they don't fear death, especially if fleeing would run counter to their superiors' wishes.

Flying Snake

Flying snakes are tiny snakes measuring no more than 1-2 feet in length. The fluff says they're sometimes used to deliver scrolls, too, which makes for a good reason why the party might attack one unprovoked.

1. **Relatively wise.** Flying snakes probably know better than to pick fights with creatures bigger than them, or those in large groups. In such cases, they will only fight to defend themselves.
2. **Hit and run.** Flying snakes have a fly speed of 60 feet and the Flyby feature. They swoop in, bite, then swoop out.
3. **Fight in water and darkness.** Flying snakes also have a decent swim speed, which means that they're capable fighters underwater where an enemy's attacks are made with disadvantage.
4. **Flee when hit.** A single hit is probably enough to kill most flying snakes. Regardless, if a flying snake takes a hit, it'll probably flee as fast as it can, flying double its speed into cover or somewhere its foes can't go.

Giant Crab

Nothing funnier than a big ol' crustacean rising out of the water and snapping up adventurers, right?

1. **They're not very wise or smart.** Giant crabs have very simple "programming" and a Wisdom score of 9. They don't consider how dangerous their opponents are before they attack. They just attack!
2. **Surprise with them.** Giant crabs have decent Stealth, blindsight, and they're amphibious. This means that they will hide in a place where they can't be seen and leap out and attack unsuspecting foes.
3. **Grab and drag.** When a giant crab hits with its claws, it grapples them. As soon as it grapples a creature, it drags them into the water or some other spot where it can finish them off.
4. **It fights until nearly dead.** Giant crabs aren't wise enough to know when they should run until it's almost too late. A giant crab keeps fighting until its hit points are reduced to 30% or fewer.

Giant Rat

The first encounter for many a Fifth Edition player, giant rats are a beloved, 1st-level staple.

1. **Fight in groups.** Most of the time, giant rats will try to fight in groups, usually at a rate of 1:1 if not higher. This also helps with their Pack Tactics.
2. **Fight in the dark.** Giant rats are primarily nocturnal creatures that hide in dirty, dark places. Their Keen Smell helps them find targets while their darkvision gives them advantage against creatures that can't see in the dark.
3. **Solo and injured rats flee.** Rats have average Wisdom, which means they probably flee when either a) they take damage that drops their hp to 40% or fewer or b) they have no more pals to help them get Pack Tactics.

Giant Weasel

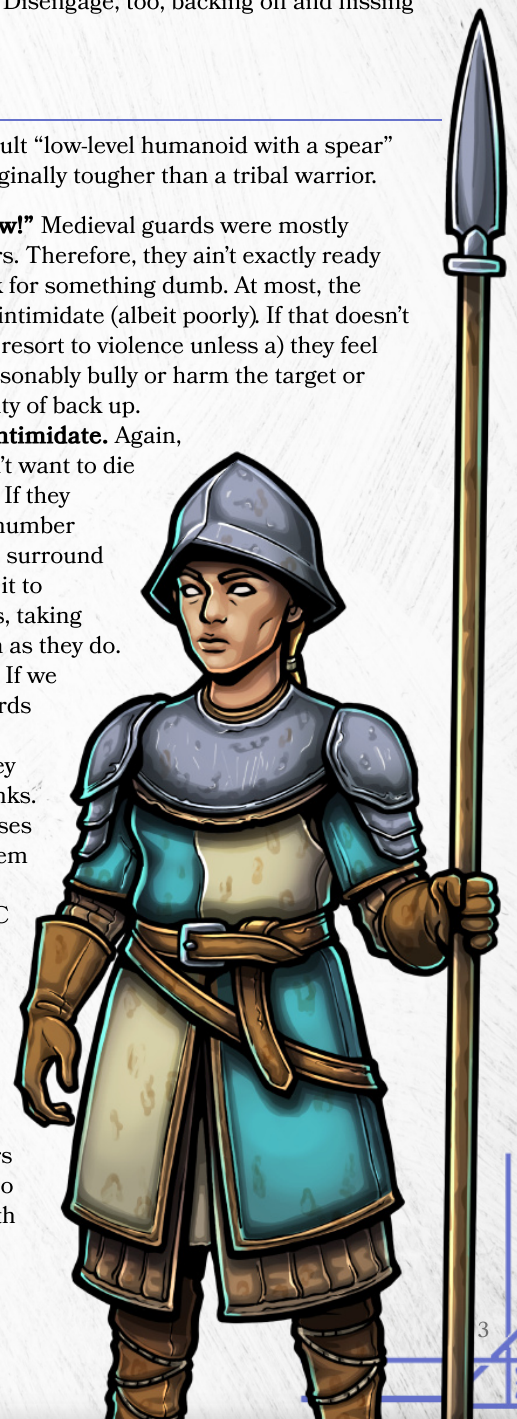
Giant weasels are pretty straightforward critters. Arguably, they're more fun as mounts for Small creatures like kobolds and goblins.

1. **They're relatively wise.** Giant weasels are relatively smart—about as smart as a velociraptor—and pretty wise. They know better than to pick a fight with an enemy that's bigger than them, or a group of enemies.
2. **Giant weasels are sneaky.** Giant weasels have pretty excellent Stealth of +5 and darkvision out to 60 feet. They will hide in dim light or darkness and surprise when they can.
3. **They're fast.** A giant weasel has a move speed of 40 feet, which means it can nail a hit before slower creatures move in on it.
4. **They run when injured.** Giant weasels know a lost fight when they see it. They'll flee when they get dropped to 50% hit points or fewer. One could argue they're probably smart enough to Disengage, too, backing off and hissing as they retreat.

Guard

Guards are the default "low-level humanoid with a spear" stat block, only marginally tougher than a tribal warrior.

1. **"Move along now!"** Medieval guards were mostly unpaid volunteers. Therefore, they ain't exactly ready to risk their neck for something dumb. At most, the guard will try to intimidate (albeit poorly). If that doesn't work, they won't resort to violence unless a) they feel that they can reasonably bully or harm the target or b) they have plenty of back up.
2. **Surround and intimidate.** Again, most guards don't want to die for unpaid work. If they significantly outnumber the target, they'll surround it and command it to drop its weapons, taking the Dodge action as they do.
3. **Military tactics.** If we assume that guards have some basic training, then they might fight in ranks. The front rank uses Dodge, giving them an effective +5 bonus to their AC and Dex saves. Meanwhile, the back rank uses the front rank as half cover (+2 to AC and Dex saves) while they throw spears or step forward to stab enemies with them.



4. **When the going gets tough, guards get going.** The moment a guard gets hit, it drops to the ground and squirms like a bug or just drops its weapon and raises its hands. In fact, guards will probably surrender if they see their friends get hit. Only “heroic” guards, those who think they’re tough, will keep fighting. Generally, this job ain’t worth dyin’ for.



Kobold

Who doesn't love a good kobold encounter? They're the ultimate "don't judge a book by its cover" critter, capable of dealing insane damage when played right. Here's a few quick tactics for these lizard-dogs.

1. **Kobolds never fight alone.** If the odds aren't 3:1, they're not interested. Plus, they get advantage on attack rolls when they have buddies around thanks to Pack Tactics.
2. **Kobolds use their environment.** Kobolds always fight in tight spaces with lots of small escape passages. Being Small creatures, they'll use tunnels that require Medium creatures to squeeze through, thus granting the kobolds advantage on their attacks against them. These tunnels are usually dark, too.

3. **Traps trap traps.** Kobolds are trap masters. Their traps aren't clever, and are usually nothing more than a simple pit trap, a bucket that dumps scorpions, or just a skunk in a room. But they are exhausting. Think *Home Alone*.
4. **Kobolds keep their distance.** Kobolds know better than to engage in melee combat. Instead, they hang back 30 feet or more and pick off heroes with their slings. The disadvantage imposed by long range is overwritten by the advantage granted by their sight as well as larger creatures having to squeeze through their tunnels.
5. **Kobolds are total cowards.** As soon as it looks like they aren't going to win a fight with some heroes, kobolds bolt. It's pretty rare that kobolds don't have at least 2-3 contingencies for every fight.

Mastiff

A mastiff is a big doggie sometimes used as a mount for Small humanoids.

1. **Mastiffs are hunters.** Mastiffs have Keen Hearing and Smell, which means that they can track enemies.
2. **Mastiffs are relatively wise.** With a Wisdom score of 12, a single mastiff won't enter a fight with a large group or Large or larger creature unless it's desperate or defending itself.
3. **Trip then attack.** Most dogs and wolves in Fifth Edition have a trip attack that lets them knock creatures prone after a bite. This is super useful for their riders and allies who can follow up with attacks against the prone creature.
4. **Flee when injured.** Mastiffs have pretty low hit points. If they manage to survive an attack, they won't wait around for another. Their high movement speed allows them to flee relatively quickly.

Merfolk

Merfolks are aquatic humanoids derived from—well, just about every mythology.

1. **Merfolk won't engage outside of water.** A merfolk out of water is at a considerable disadvantage due to its low movement speed.
2. **Merfolk fight in groups.** Merfolk are clever enough to recognize a fight they can't win. Unless they're desperate or defending themselves, they will likely surrender to foes that they don't outnumber or overpower.
3. **Merfolk use defensive tactics.** A merfolk stays out of an enemy's movement range and only attacks if an enemy starts its turn within 20 feet of it, throwing its spear in response (underwater, you can't throw a weapon more than its normal range). Once it throws the spear, it puts distance between itself and its target again and repeats this method.
4. **Merfolk flee when injured.** If the merfolk has no choice but to enter combat, the moment it takes a hit, it tries to escape, Disengaging and swimming at full speed.

Mule

Finally, here are the tactics for that epic mule fight you've been dreaming up.

1. **Mules aren't interested in fighting.** Beyond a defensive kick, a mule isn't going to attack someone unless it's forced to. They're pretty simple and wise enough to know not to pick a fight.
2. **Medium creatures can ride them.** Despite being a Medium creature itself, its Beast of Burden feature allows Medium creatures to use them as mounts. This makes them the cheapest mount in the game.
3. **Mules aren't proficient with their hooves.** A mule has only a +2 to hit with its hooves, which means it's not proficient in its own attack. This again points to the idea that mules don't fight.
4. **Mules run at the first sign of danger.** I consider most mules "independent" mounts, meaning they don't follow orders. Without fight training, mules run if they even get a hint that there's danger nearby. This includes those being used as mounts. Watch in glee as the barbarian's mule freaks when a giant rat pops out and it runs away, taking the barbarian with it. You might allow a character to use its action or bonus action to make a DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check, preventing this catastrophe with a success.

Noble

Nobles represent the snooty upper class and frequently represent social challenges in Fifth Edition.

1. **Nobles are social foes.** Nobles are proficient in Deception, Insight, and Persuasion. They will almost always try to negotiate their way out of a sticky situation.
2. **Nobles come with protection.** A noble will rarely be out of its element, meaning that they always meet folks on their time. Unless they're doing something shady, they will probably have a few guards, thugs, or other NPCs there to protect them.
3. **Nobles are defensive fighters.** A noble fights defensively first, always waiting for the perfect opportunity to strike (this extends to its social encounters, too). Have the noble Dodge and Parry until it sees an opening.
4. **Nobles surrender fast.** It doesn't take much for a noble to surrender. Wealthy and wise, they'd rather cough up a few hundred gold pieces than meet their maker.
5. **Nobles can afford to be revived.** Nobles are wealthy. So long as divine magic is common in your world, they likely have insurance in place for revivification magic.

Poisonous Snake

Poisonous snakes are a lot of fun because they're relatively simple creatures that have no qualms biting things bigger than they. In many ways, they're more like hazards than actual monsters, dealing damage to those who aren't careful.

1. **They're sneaky.** A poisonous snake isn't very strong or tough, so it relies mostly on its relatively high Dexterity, blindsight, and swimming speed to surprise foes. They're likely to attack while heavily obscured such as being in thick grass or total darkness, where they can move unseen. Because they have blindsight, this means their attacks are made with advantage against most foes.
2. **Snakes attack larger creatures only as defense.** A Tiny snake won't attack a Small or larger creature unless it feels threatened. Moving near its nest or close to it is enough to warrant an attack from it.
3. **They're poisonous (duh).** The majority of a poisonous snake's damage comes from the poison in its bite, which deals an average of 2 damage to creatures it hits.
4. **They bite, then flee.** Once they bite and deal damage, the snake flees unless it feels it can reasonably eat whatever came near it. If it's heavily obscured, it can retreat without fear of reprisal. The snake will stick around only to defend itself or if it lacks an escape route.



Pony

If the camel and mule fail to kill the characters, then try on the ever-so-deadly pony.

1. **Ponies don't enter combat except to defend themselves.** Like most herbivorous creatures, ponies don't attack unless they feel threatened or they've been commanded to by a rider.
2. **Ponies kick as a warning, then move.** Ponies are actually proficient with their kick (unlike mules), and can actually kill a fair number of creatures with a single kick. However, they aren't naturally aggressive creatures, so it's unlikely that they'll press the attack beyond a single kick.
3. **Ponies are trained for riding.** I would say that ponies are probably trained as riders but not necessarily for combat. This means that they follow commands up until the point where they feel their life is in danger, at which point they turn and flee against their rider's commands. A character can use its action or bonus action to calm the pony with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. Of course, exceptions apply.

Stirge

Possibly the most loathsome of all the CR 1/8 monsters, stirges are ridiculously overpowered little buggers that most players know to fear.

1. **Stirges fight in big groups.** Although they aren't wise, it's safe to say that they propagate like bats. Therefore, most stirge mobs will have four or more stirges present.

2. **Stirges aren't very wise.** Stirges don't care if they're weaker or outnumbered than their targets. All they care about is draining that sweet, sweet blood.
3. **Stirges look for a clean meal.** Stirges probably don't share. So if there's already one or two stirges snacking on a hero, they will look for a target that doesn't already have a stirge attached to it.
4. **Stirges only flee when they're full.** When a stirge drains 10 hit points, it flees. Until then, it continues to drain blood, foregoing its own safety.

Tribal Warrior

Tribal warriors are a step above commoners in terms of their ability to fight, but probably not as well trained as guards.

1. **Tribal warriors threaten first.** Like guards, a tribal warrior will likely try to threaten and command before they engage in combat, especially if the foe is larger or outnumbers them.
2. **Tribal warriors fight in packs.** With Pack Tactics, tribal warriors prefer to fight in groups, trying to number 1:1 or better.
3. **Ranged first, then melee.** As tribal warriors close in on their targets, they toss their spears. From there, they move in and switch to melee, where they get the benefits of their Pack Tactics. Arguably, they're not intelligent enough to use defensive maneuvers like guards, so they focus mostly on offense.
4. **They flee when the odds are against them.** When the ratio drops below 1:1 or a tribal warrior's hit points are reduced by 50% or more, it retreats. Although they aren't as smart as guards or other humanoid fighters, they probably know how to Disengage properly. Ω



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