

In this .pdf, we are going to go over Storm King's Thunder and discuss the things you need to know when running the adventure. This guide has a lot of stuff that should make your life easier. At the end, I have included a sample campaign so newer DMs can get an idea of how to put this adventure together.

This guide grew out of my blog:

Power Score RPG

<http://powerscorerpg.blogspot.com/>

<http://thecampaign20xx.blogspot.com/>

When Does This Adventure Take Place?

The timeline is kept purposely vague to suit your campaign. This adventure definitely takes place after Tyranny of Dragons. There is a sidebar on page 13 that says that this adventure is assumed to be set after the year 1485 DR.

- **The Spellplague** hit in 1385 DR, which marked the beginning of 4th edition.
- **The Sundering** occurred in either 1484 or 1485 DR and marked the beginning of the D&D Next playtest era.

So, yeah, here we are. I'd say you should put in at least a year to account for Tyranny of Dragons, which occurs prior to this adventure.

I think saying that there is one year of time between each adventure sounds good. Out of the Abyss could take a very long time in-game. So here's what you do:

- 1486 DR: Tyranny of Dragons
- 1487 DR: Princes of the Apocalypse
- 1488 DR: Out of the Abyss
- 1489 DR: Curse of Strahd
- 1490 DR: Storm King's Thunder

If This is Your First Campaign

New DMs: If you are new to being a dungeon master, it is important to remember that you can do whatever you want with this book. The authors are expecting you to change things to suit your style. There is no "wrong" way to run this.

Also, if you're new, don't get stressed out over running this thing. Being a DM is hard and nobody is expecting you to be the greatest DM in the world. The important thing is to always keep things "fun" and to try your best to be fair. If you have time, watch some Dice, Camera, Action to see how Chris Perkins runs his games. He wrote this adventure.

If the group comes up with a clever plan, let them be clever! It's important to find the right "difficulty setting" for your game. You'll probably do a lot of tweaking. That's what we do behind the DM screen, we fiddle with knobs.

The best thing of all about this adventure is that chapter one is pretty straight forward. All you have to do is read it and take some notes, then let your group go nuts. That chapter alone should take you a few sessions and will give you time to find your footing.

How to Prepare this Adventure

I am going to give you my approach to how I would set up and run this adventure. My way isn't "right" or "better" than anyone else. I am doing this so you can see how you can take this adventure apart and then put it back together to form the adventure you want.

Let's do a quick, basic outline.

1. Nightstone: The group goes through chapter 1. That's very straightforward. The villagers need help.
2. Pick One of Three Locations: Chapter 2 is trickier. The group will have to pick a hook. If there is one place you like and want to use, just give the group that one hook. For example, I like Bryn Shander. So I would have the group be asked to go to Bryn Shander and tell Markham his sister is dead. I wouldn't even mention the Goldenfields and Triboar quests.
3. Zephyros: Now we fly in the cloud castle to Bryn Shander.
4. Bryn Shander: In Bryn Shander, we go through the frost giant attack.
5. Sort Out Chapter 3: Then we get to the most complicated part of planning this thing out. Chapter 3 is wide open. Ultimately, the group is meant to meet Harshnag (page 118). How and when that happens is completely up to you! Remember, if you like another of the chapter 2 locations, there's nothing stopping you from using it now.
- 6A. Winging It: If you are a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants kind of DM, then just let the group go where they want and when it feels like it is time, plop in Harshnag.
- 6B. Planning: If you are like me and you like to prepare, I suggest that you go through chapter 3 and find all the things that you want to use. Then look at the map on pages 74-75 and see where all these places are in relation to each other. Then just connect the dots - make a reason for the group to go from one place to the next. I have already broken down this chapter into quick little blurbs in my Guide to Storm King's Thunder.
7. The Oracle: Once the group meets Harshnag, then they are off to the Eye (page 121). The group will be asked to go to all those burial mounds in chapter 3. I don't like those, so in my version I changed it. Some people online have said they didn't like the idea of desecrating holy sites, so consider your group before you run this as written.

8. Iymrith: The group gets the artifacts and returns to the oracle. They learn that they need a conch. On the way out, Iymrith attacks and Harshnag makes a heroic sacrifice.

9. Find the Conch: In the book, every giant lord has a conch. The heroes will need to go steal a conch from a giant lord. I liked a lot of these areas, so in my version I changed things a little so I can use Svardsborg, Ironslag and the Cloud Giant castle in my campaign.

10. Use the Conch: It takes the group to Maelstrom (page 201). There, the heroes hopefully expose Iymrith and get a clue to Hekaton's whereabouts.

11. King Hekaton: The group tracks down Hekaton and saves him!

12. Final Battle: The adventurers team up with Hekaton to take down Iymrith. As written, there's a bunch of NPC giants with the group. That seems a little unwieldy, so think about if you really want to take these NPCs along.

Foreshadowing

Once that is done, I suggest that you go back through your neat little outline and place clues and ideas. A lot of stuff in this adventure feels kind of out of the blue. I think it's a good idea to let the characters hear about some of these things in advance so it doesn't feel so random. Here's some topics to consider foreshadowing:

- The Golden Goose Token: I think it would be fun to have the group gamble on The Grand Dame (page 216) during chapter 2. You can watch the group light up when Serissa shows them the token in chapter 19.
- Iymrith: I think the group should hear legends of Iymrith long before they meet her so it's more awe-inspiring and epic when they face her.
- The Wyrmskull Throne: Serissa gets paralyzed when the Korolnor Scepter is taken from her (pages 209-210). This might feel very bizarre and random to the group. I suggest having the group learn about the Wyrmskull Throne and how it interacts with the scepter beforehand.
- Slarkrethel and the Cult: If you can, let the group hear tales of the legendary kraken and maybe hear word of the cult that worships Slarkrethel. This is tricky because this organization is kind of a surprise villain and you don't want to show your hand. I think if you present this detail among a sea of other details, it won't stick out. So I'd say you should present legends and rumors of two other shadowy organizations in prior sessions first to get the group used to this sort of presentation. That way, your inclusion of a mention of the Kraken Society won't stick out.
- Felgolos: If you are going to use the Cloud Giant castle, you might want to have the group meet Felgolos early on so they'll care when they find out he is being tortured.
- Harshnag and the Gray Hands: Harshnag was a member of the Gray Hands, now known today as Force Grey. The group should hear about their exploits, so when they meet Harshnag they know who he is.

Remember that your plans are not set in stone. Who knows what weird choices the group will make? Just adjust your outline as you go and indulge the players as much as you can.

Leveling

Once you start rearranging things, you might get worried about when to level your group. Chapter 3 is so huge that the adventurers could gain quite a few levels. I don't think you need to worry about the group getting too powerful. The giants are really tough. Worst case, just add in another giant to each encounter.

As an example, fighting those 4 ambassadors in Maelstrom seems like a tough encounter for a group of almost any level.

I don't think you need to be concerned if your group ends up at 13th level or whatever.

Things to do Before You Begin the Campaign

- Warn your players that some of the encounters are very hard and that they might need to run away. See "Deadly Encounters" on page 17. It is expected that the group will either try to interact with or run from monsters that are much more powerful than they are.
- At least one character in the party should speak Giant.
- Check out "Random Magic Items" on page 18 and consider letting your players each make a 'wish list' of magic items. Maybe have them pick three items per chart. Then you can just roll on that list during the adventure.
- Pick out some mundane items off the chart on page 18 in advance. If a giant has a huge brass gong, you might want to know that up front so it can be used in the encounter in some fun way.
- Every single chapter has a bunch of instances where you roll on random magic item charts from the DMG. I highly recommend handling this in advance, as it will grind your game to a halt.
- Foreshadow the Runes: When you describe the giants, you might want to mention the weird rune/symbol many of them wear. In the dungeon area on page 125, you can see that each type of giant has a rune associated with them. In that area, the group needs to figure out what each rune means. If you place non-magic/cosmetic runes on the giants, then the group has a chance to learn what they are in advance and they will be rewarded for paying attention.
- Foreshadow the Chip: In chapter 11, the group needs to find out where a gambling chip came from. You might want to have the heroes see these chips during their earlier adventures. See chapter 11 for everything about the chip.
- Alternate Giant Powers: Make sure you check out the giant options on page 245-246. There are fun new powers you can give your giants to keep them from getting repetitive. My favorite power is "Fling," where the giant throws you 60 feet.
- Klauth the Red Dragon: The group should hear about the red dragon Klauth before chapter four. You should try to build up the legend of Klauth. This dragon gives the group an airship and it will have more impact if they know who Klauth is in advance. See page 95 for info on this dragon. Also, check out this article by Ed Greenwood.

- Familiarize the Players with the Names of the Giant Lords: When you use the giants, I think you should have them call out the name of their leader, or the group hears them talking about their leader, whatever. You are going to want to make sure that your players are aware that the leaders control the schemes and are the ones that need to be defeated. When the group gets to the oracle on page 129, it is somewhat expected that they will ask the oracle about the leaders. The group will ultimately need to pick at least one giant lord to kill.
- The Importance of the Conch: Every giant lord has a conch of teleportation. The heroes will need one of these to find King Hekaton.
- Dragons vs. Giants: Remember that in this adventure, the group can team up with all sorts of dragons, even evil ones. It could lead to lots of fun things.
- Big Map at the End: Be aware that you might want to make a big poster map of Iymrith's amphitheater (page 228) way at the end of the campaign. It's hard to draw, but it seems like if you can do it you should give it a try.
- Storm Giant Stats: Don't forget that storm giant stats are on the very last page of this book (page 256). That should save you a little bit of shuffling during the game.

The Overall Storyline: King Hekaton, ruler of the giants, is dead or missing. The giants are all fighting to re-organize their caste system, known as The Ordning.

Mirran and Nym, two of Hekaton's daughters, secretly killed their mother and sent Hekaton on a wild goose chase looking for the murderers (few are aware that Hekaton has since been captured by the Kraken Society). Now their sister Serissa rules the giants. Iymrith, a dragon, is manipulating Mirran and Nym. All of them want to overthrow Serissa.

No Pressure: On page 16, it is noted that there is no time pressure. The group is free to wander. It's kind of tricky to convey that, though. I mean.. once that frost giant finds the ring of winter, the world is plunged into an ice age! Why would you take your time?

Leveling: The group should not hit level 10 until they've finished chapters 10 and 11 (aka, once they've rescued King Hekaton). I don't think it will be a big deal if your group ends up higher level than they're supposed to be.

Getting Captured: Because of the deadly encounters, the book advises you to have them be taken prisoner rather than just being killed.

On a recent D&D podcast, Chris Perkins talks about Storm King's Thunder. He explained a lot of things that I think you should know:

- The Giants Are Supposed to be Too Powerful: The idea of this adventure is that it is supposed to be similar to the walking dead. Low level characters are trying to survive and figure out how to deal with giants who are far too powerful for them to handle. Eventually, the group becomes powerful enough to take them on. He mentions that forming an alliance with other giants is a major option.
- Sandbox: He says that this adventure is sandbox-y because the sandbox elements of previous adventures were well-received.

- Random: They put in the choices and randomness so that the adventure is different each time people run it.
- Support a Daughter: The characters will have to choose which daughter to support. Choosing the wrong one has grave consequences for the realms.
- The Zhentarim Are Allies: It was mentioned on another D&D podcast that while the Zhentarim are "bad guys," they sometimes do good things. In this adventure, because they are trying to protect their interests, they will team up with the Harpers and other factions.
- Links to the Future: There are things that you find in this adventure that come into play in future adventures.
- Chapter 3 Happened for a Weird Reason: Chris says that he realized after his pitch was accepted that there was tons of space between all of the lairs. He needed to describe all of the areas in between. The research was this huge, daunting thing. He raided the library, took a week off to go through all of the old books (volo's guides, savage frontier, etc).
- Winged Cats: The tressym (winged cats) are in the adventure because they had some space to fill in the appendix. They went back and wrote them into the adventure.
- The Wyrmskull Throne: The wyrmskull throne was put into this adventure because they came up with a title for the adventure that involved the throne. But ultimately they ended up using a new name, and the throne remained.
- Acquisitions Inc. Airship: The airship from chapter 4 is exactly like the one that the Acquisitions Incorporated group has.
- All of the dragons in this adventure are from Ed Greenwood's Wyrms of the North Dragon Magazine articles.

Adventure Outline

There's a nice synopsis of the adventure on page 16 and a sweet flowchart on page 17. Here's a quick list that should give you the gist of things:

1. The group checks out a village that was recently attacked by giants.
2. A cloud giant takes the heroes to a settlement (their choice: Bryn Shander, Goldenfields or Triboar).
3. The group must defend that settlement from a giant attack.
4. From there, the group can follow one of a billion hooks to have all sorts of side adventures indifferent areas. Eventually, they meet the frost giant hero named Harshnag.
5. Harshnag brings the group to an oracle who helps them figure out what is going on with the giants. The oracle first wants the group to retrieve giant artifacts from barbarian burial mounds.
6. The adventurers go to 9 different mounds and gets the items.
7. The group returns to the oracle with the items and are allowed to ask 6 questions. They can learn that they need to find out what happened to King Hekaton and that they need to get a conch from a giant lord.
8. Iymrith the blue dragon attacks during the oracle thing. Harshnag holds her off while the group escapes.
9. The heroes basically pick one giant lord out of five and attacks them. That giant lord has a conch of teleportation that will get the group to the undersea realm of Maelstrom.