SKT: Giants & Montages

Chapter 3 of Storm King's Thunder is an open-world sandbox which feels overwhelming in scope and takes some groups months to work through. This supplement is a guide on how run Chapter 3 in a single session. If you're a hard-line stickler for story fidelity, rules-as-written and preserving the pace of the official module, you will absolutely hate this supplement. But for those of you brave enough to let go of the safe, hard-cover handrail, we're going to explore some rad options by kickflipping over the trickiest section of this adventure.

Content warning
Some of the original content in this supplement involves a domestic violence storyline.

What to expect

This session is a three-month montage of your party romping all over the Sword Coast, finishing at the Giant Temple at the start of Chapter 4. Your party will find an unlikely friend in The Grim Giant, pick up threads for a half-dozen upcoming story beats, and earn some sick loot. Your party should start the session at Level 6 and hit Level 7 at the end. Although this session should only be 3-4 hours of gameplay, it will require more prep-time than usual because of how much content you're going to squeeze in — you're going to leave your players breathless. You're going to accomplish this through a structure called The Montage Dungeon.

GOALS OF THIS SESSION

As always, you should have specific goals you want to achieve this session as the Dungeon Master. Whenever you feel lost, just remember: If you're building towards any of the session's goals, you're on the right track.

Exposition. Give the payers crucial information about the campaign. In Chapter 4, the players are going to have an opportunity to ask the Giant Oracle three questions, so you need to make sure they have enough information to ask intelligent questions.

Relationships. Rivals and allies alike, some of the NPCs your party meets during this session will return throughout the campaign.

Spectacle. Part of the wonder of Storm King's Thunder is the scale, but we're potentially diminishing that spectacle by short-handing Chapter 3, so you should simulate the module's scale by showing off as many locations as you can this session.

Loot. Buff the party by distributing magic items. Many of the challenges coming up in later sessions are very tough, so you want to make sure the players receive loot equivalent to what they would have gotten if you'd run Chapter 3 as written.

REMEMBER YOUR GIANT THREAT

You are going to mainly focussing on the Giant Lord you want your players to tackle after Chapter 4. There's no point putting too much effort into exposition about Hill Giants when you want your players to face off against Frost Giants. Keep that in mind as you decide which scenes to focus on.

Shorthand Travel Rules

The official rules for travel would have you tracking time, distance and resources as the party overcome hazards and wandering monsters — we don't have time for any of that. For the purpose of respecting the players' time, throughout this whole campaign, we're using Shorthand Travel Rules:

✪ The party can travel to any known location without needing to roleplay or describe the journey.

✪ Some locations might require specific vehicles or abilities to access, regardless of whether the location is known to the party.

✪ One player is designated to keep track of the party's known locations and requirements to travel there.

✪ The party are presumed to have the resources to make the journey, and are presumed to have resupplied along the way without expending any money or tracking rations.

✪ The party are presumed to overcome any hazards or wandering monsters along the journey without needing to expend any character resources or roleplay the encounters.

✪ In-game time advances an appropriate amount as determined by the Dungeon Master. If time is a crucial factor in your game, consult the three tables below.

Local Travel

Dice	Time	Distance
D4	Hours	Short
2D4	Hours	Medium
3D4	Hours	Long

Regional Travel

Dice	Time	Distance
D4	Days	Short
2D4	Days	Medium
3D4	Days	Long

Global Travel

Dice	Time	Distance
D4	Weeks	Short
2D4	Weeks	Medium
3D4	Weeks	Long

The Montage Dungeon

This session will span three months of in-game time by zooming in on a half-dozen key scenes and handwaving the parts inbetween. If your session is shorter or longer than three months of in-game time, that's fine — it all comes out in the wash.

The flash-forward

This session will end at the Giant Temple, so to make sure the party gets there, you should use a flash-forward. At the beginning of your session, describe the party three months in the future standing at the entrance to the Giant Temple. Keep your description vague in the beginning, but revisit it a few times throughout the session to fill in details as the characters make decisions. Imagine this working like Marty McFly's family photo in Back to the Future — the party's decisions on their adventure change the description of this scene outside the Giant Temple. When you revisit the flash-forward scene throughout the session, try to acknowledge the difference in time as the party approaches the point of convergence.

For example, this might be how you could describe the opening flash-forward:

> *Three months from now, in the biting frost of a swirling showstorm, four humanoid figures stand atop a rocky crest, looking down at an ancient temple. Wrapped in their thick woolen cloaks, the four figures are difficult to see, but it's clear they've have an exhausting journey. In a quest fraught with mysteries, they're finally looking down a place of clear, unambiguous answers.*

But at the moment the party decides to bring the Grim Giant along on their adventure, you could amend your description like this:

> *Two weeks from now, a fifth figure steps up to join the four adventures. This new person is five times larger than the others, hefting wicked, frozen axe on his shoulder.*

Choosing Scenes

In this session, each available scene is represented by an index card on the table. The party starts with two cards on the table. After every scene is resolved, add two cards to cards to the available cards. The maximum number of index cards available at any one time is equal to the highest Survival skill bonus in the party. The session finishes when the party travels to the Giant Temple.

Resolving scenes

This is a montage, so not every moment gets rendered in the story through eye-level roleplaying. You will be abbreviating conversations, breezing through details and handwaving trivial combat — you're going to be improvising a lot. Each scene should take you 20 minutes to resolve. To achieve this quick pace, many of your ability checks are going to be presumed to succeed without rolling, or your party will be failing forward (also known as "succeeding at a cost"). In many cases, you'll be able to lean on the players' contributions to how things are resolved. Each scene has loot listed — work with the players to decide how they've acquired these rewards.

Involving the players

Each scene is probably going to have some massive time-skip involved — like the party travelling through the desert or investigating leads in the city. Like a montage in a movie, you should ask your players for a 5-second snippet of something   in the narrative. You should include any NPC allies in the montage too. For example:

> **DM:** *You are travelling through the desert. Would the three of you please share a description of a single five-second moment from your journey.*
>
> **Paladin:** *We get in a fight with some giant scorpians and I collect their tails as trophies.*
>
> **Bard:** *I drink some cactus juice and start tripping, so the party have to strap me down to a camel for a leg of the journey.*
>
> **Cleric:** *I keep telling everyone how much I hate sand because it's course and gets in everything.*
>
> **DM:** *And your NPC ally, the dragon scholar, insists on telling you the scientific name for every piece of flora and fauna the party passes in the desert.*

Zooming In

Sometimes your players might want to focus on a particular moment rather than let it get swept away in montage's quick pace. Give your players the opportunity and authority to zoom in on details as they arrive to have a brief interaction with your story on an eye level. For example, "Dungeon Master, you mentioned that we were looking for leads in a tavern in Waterdeep. Because my character is from Waterdeep, can we zoom in on my character talking to the locals in the pub?"

Resting

In the offical rules of D&D, this three-month timeframe would afford the party enough time between scenes to take a long rest and regain all their resources. But allowing the party to face every challenge at full strength would undercut the drama of overcoming those challenges. So in order to take a long or short rest, the party will have to select the correct scenes. To incentivise the party to take risks and engage with this special resting mechanic, if the party can complete the session without taking a long rest, they all get inspiration. Please note that short rests are fine.

Beginning the session

Your players probably aren't used to playing D&D in this kind of way, so you should try to help them set expectations with an explaination. Literally say this to your players:

> *My lovely players, this session your party is adventuring all up-and-down the Sword Coast over three months. Your goal is to find answers about this Giant Threat. But this session is a little different to the way D&D usually works — this session is a montage. Each of these cards on the table are individual scenes and quests your party could face along your three-month journey.*
>
> *I want you to treat each of these cards like rooms in a dungeon — even though there's potentially weeks between these scenes, you don't automatically get a long or short rest between scenes. To take a long rest, you would need to visit the long rest scene, and to take a short rest, you would need to visit short rest scene. If you can complete this whole session without taking a long rest, everybody gets a point of inspiration. This session is going to have a very fast pace, so if there's anything details we're covering broadly in the story and you want to zoom in to have a brief character moment and roleplay it on an eye-level, please let me know during the session.*

Finishing the session

The session finishes when the party goes to the Giant Temple. To get access to that location, the party muse first meet the Grim Giant. If you were to treat the encounter with this crucial NPC like any of the other scenes, the players might not choose it and would miss the opportunity. So instead, this important meeting happens directly after one of the other scenes about halfway through the session.

Scenes

The scenes below are just suggestions. You should go through the book, find your own favourite moments, quests and characters, and construct them in a brief format as below. If you look at any of these suggestions and think, "Oh I don't like this one," choose a different sidequest or location from Chapter 3 which could fill a similar purpose. When you put these options in front of the players, include the scene's name — the goal is to make all options exciting and worth exploring.

The Party Meets a Cool Deer (short rest)
Purpose: Short rest.
New locations: None.
Important characters: None.
Loot: Golden antlers worth 500GP (or usable for crafting a magical item potentially).

✪ The party makes camp in an idyllic nature setting and encounters a herd of deer. One has antlers made of gold. The party can kill the deer and collect the antlers, but if they do, they are marked by a curse which can manifest in any way you choose when interacting with The Barbarians.

The Party Goes to the Beach (long rest)
Purpose: Long rest.
New locations: None.
Important characters: None.
Loot: None.

✪ The party have a nice time at the beach with some harmless shenannigans.
✪ Everybody rolls a Constitution saving throw to determine how sunburnt they get.

The Party Finishes the Montage
Purpose: Finish the session.
New locations: The Giant Temple.
Important characters: None.
Loot: None.

✪ Only put this scene out as an option after the party has met the Grim Giant and had an opportunity to bond with him a little. If you put this scene on the table, be prepared for your session to end at any junction.
✪ Resolve the flash-forward and end the session.
✪ Everybody hits level 7.

The Party Learn How to Fly
Purpose: Highlight that it's not just ONE kind of giant rampaging through the Sword Coast, and give players transport options.
New locations: Fireshear.
Important characters: Dasharra, the Griffon Knight.
Loot: Roll once on Magic Item Table F in the DMG.

✪ Fireshear is attacked in similar fashion to Bryn Shander, Triboar or Goldenfields was in Chapter 2, but this time by a different kind of giant trying to accomplish a different goal. Frefer to The Giant Attack PDF for information on what each giant faction is trying to accomplish.
✪ As part of the town's defense, the party mobalise the griffon roost with the aid of Dasharra, the Griffon Knight.
✪ One of Dasharra's griffons could be a potential battle companion in flying combat.

The Party Recovers an Ancient Giant Artifact
Purpose: If you want to fast-forward your campaign's progression and skip the Giant's Relic portion of Chapter 4, include this option. Otherwise, do not include this scene as an option.
New locations: Grandfather Tree.
Important characters: Young Orcbane, the Chieftan's Son.
Loot: A Giant Artifact associated with your Giant Threat AND Roll once on Magic Item Table B in the DM (or Young Orcbane's Oathbow if the party kills him).

✪ One of the player characters falls very ill in the wilderness. Ask the players to volunteer one of their characters to fall ill. Let the players decide what the cause of the illness is.
✪ The party learns about the healing properties of the Grandfather Tree, the Spirit Mound of the Tree Ghost Tribe. The party must devise a plan to sneak past, defeat, lure away or befriend the Tree Ghost Tribe to drink the tree's sap.
✪ Optionally, rather than content with the tribe members in this mini-quest, the party could help defend the Grandfather Tree against corrupted centaurs. Or perhaps they could be faced with Dryad's riddles to get close to the tree.
✪ Young Orcbane is a potential battle companion.

The Party Plunders a Dragon Graveyard
Purpose: Hint at Imyrith's existance and goals.
New locations: Ascore.
Important characters: The Dragon Scholar.
Loot: Roll once on Magic Item Table F in the DMG, 2d4 art objects worth 250GP each.

✪ The party is hired to escort a dragon scholar to help him exhume the remains of an Blue Dragon burial site. He has it on good authority that the Dragon of the Statues has has been missing for months, so she's probably dead or she's taken a new lair somewhere.

✪ The party travels through the desert to a site marked on the scholar's map, but they find the site has already been plundered.

✪ Investigation finds that the skeleton that was here was missing a skull when it was buried. It wasn't exhumed by humanoids, but something gargantuan claws, probably the size of building.

✪ The party are ambushed by a hoarde of Yuan-Ti and gargoyles who chase them away from the site — they seem to be protecting it. This could be resolved by combat or by a chase skill challenge where characters who fail suffer a point of exhaustion.

✪ The Dragon Scholar is a potential Battle Companion

The Party Impresses the Great Dragon
Purpose: Seed the Dragon Cult so it doesn't seem so strange when the airship appears at the end of Chapter 4.
New locations: The Bargewright Inn.
Important characters: Delphi, the Dragon Cultist.
Loot: Roll once on Magic Item Table B in the DMG.

✪ The party are sitting around a table in a tavern talking about some their heroic deeds involving giants. Let the party decide what feat they've achieved, otherwise suggest something related to your preferred Giant Threat.

✪ Delphi, who has been following the party, overhears the conversation and apporaches the party to hear more of their deeds.

✪ When Delphi ascertains the party is in opposition to the giants, she says "War against the giants is inevitable, but the Great Dragon of the North commands you forge ahead and face your destiny! Look to the sky in your time of need."

✪ Delphi is a potential Battle Companion after Chapter 4.

The Party Meets the Worst Adventurer Ever
Purpose: Seed the ideas of the hierarchy in giant society and introduce the idea of the Storm Giant heirarchy.
New locations: Zymorven Hall, Yartar.
Important characters: None.
Loot: A Giant Slayer weapon.

✪ The party learn about a legendary knight who killed giants with a magical weapon of Giant Slaying. When the party meets the knight to acquire his weapon, he says his son stole it and went off to be an adventurer.

✪ The party follows breadcrumbs of failed and botched quests the knight's son has left littered all along the Sword Coast befoet they find a solid lead — the terrible adventurer has decided challenge a Hill Giant to combat in the wilderness.

✪ The party comes apon the adventurer laying prone between a Hill Giant and a Storm Giant. The Hill Giant has a club raised mennacingly over the fallen adventurer while the Storm Giant is trying to deescalate the situation. The Storm Giant has orders from Imyrith and Uthor to find the humans resonponsible for killing Queen Neri and abducting King Hekaton and wants to question the human. The Hill Giant makes a big show of not having to obey the Storm Giants anymore and kills the adventurer. The Hill Giant kills the human and the two giants start fighting.

✪ If the players want to intervene, it's a three-way fight. If they let the combat resolve, the Storm Giant wins moves to take the body and all the human's possessions. The party must decide whether to fight the Storm Giant for the weapon of Giant Slaying before he leaves. If they decide to fight the Storm Giant, he starts combat at half health and uses its action to blow a Conch of Teleportation to return to Maelstrom rather than let himself be captured when he reaches 0 hit points.

The Party Stages a Prison Break
Purpose: Seed the idea of a secret gambling organisation and introduce the Weevil as a potential ally or rival.
New locations: Yartar.
Important characters: The Weevil.
Loot: Roll once on Magic Item Table C in the DMG, 2d6 gems worth 100GP each.

✪ One of the player characters gets arrested in Yartar. Ask the players to volunteer one of their characters to be arrested. Let the players decide what they get arrested for.

✪ A shady person approaches the players and asks them to break The Weevil out of prison in Yartar, along with their imprisoned party member. They pose as one of Weevil's henchmen, but are actually an agent of the Casino Lord.

✪ The Weevil is guilty of all the crimes in the official module and has already been arrested. But secretly, he is also owes 20,000GP to the Casino Lord from the ship in the aptly-numbered Chapter 11. The Casino Lord wants to exact lethal punishment on The Weevil outside the regular justice system.

✪ However the party decide to accomplish this task (by breaking him out sneakily, violently, or even mounting a legitamite legal defence), Weevil is unwilling to leave prison and wants to stay incarcerated. He divulges the information that he owes 20,000GP because of gambling debts and some people want him dead, but he won't say to who or share any information about the secret casino. The party can decide whether they free him or leave him in prison.

✪ Even if the party frees the Weevil and hands him over to the Casino Lord's henchmen, the party later sees a new wanted poster for his capture, meaning he managed to escape again.

✪ The Weevil is a potential battle companion after Chapter 10.

The Party Smashes a Cult
Purpose: Seed the idea of an unknown eldritch entity (the kraken) and introduce the NPC who will become the Kraken's Assassin.
New locations: Waterdeep.
Important characters: Rool, the Kraken's Assassin.
Loot: Roll twice on Magic Item Table A in the DMG, 1d4 art objects worth 150GP each.

✪ The party is contacted by a woman to help find her missing husband. After some investigation, the party learns her husband is part of a criminal syndicate in Waterdeep, and the whole organisation has gone off the grid.

✪ Following a series of leads, the party learns the organisation had an internal coup, where cultists took over and began forcibly baptising non-believers.

✪ The party breaks up one such ceremony in the organisations dock-side hideout as the person they're looking for, the NPC who will become the Kraken's Assassin, is being held down in black vat of sea water and squid ink as part of some ritual.

✪ When the party defeat the cultists and save the man from the dark baptism, he seems fine. They return him to his wife. Days later, word gets to the party that the quest-giver was found drowned in a bucket of sea water in their home. The NPC who would become the Kraken's Assassin has disappeared.

✪ Unknown to the players, this man is now under the sway of the kraken and has gone to join the crew of its flagship.

The Party Loses an Eating Competition

Purpose: Reinforce the giant threat (only use this scene if the Hill Giants are who you want your players to attack after Chapter 4).

New locations: Amphail.

Important characters: Lord Roaringhorn, Roderik Hilltopple.

Loot: Roll once on Magic Item Table B in the DMG.

✪ Lord Roringhorn is throwing a grand feast in honor of his birthday. The celebration is noticably lacking any meat, because the supplier Roderik Hilltopple has gone missing.

✪ The party partake in a bunch of silly party shennanigan's, including pin the tail on the dragon and an eating competition.

✪ Hill Giants break up the party by storming through and stealing as much food as they can. The Hill Giants had interrogated Roderik Hilltopple who is their prisoner with the Hill Giant Lord.

✪ Roderik Hilltopple is a potential battle companion during Chapter 5.

The Party Fools a Big Bird

Purpose: Reinforce the giant threat (only use this scene if the Stone Giants are who you want your players to attack after Chapter 4).

New locations: Hawk's Nest.

Important characters: Lavencia, The Pegasus Knight.

Loot: 500GP for each strongbox recovered.

✪ The supply lines to the Hawk's Nest have been cut off by a roc that is terrorsing the roads. The party is hired to recover strongboxes of rare building supplies from a convey of carvans out on the road.

✪ This attack has taken on a pattern, where the roc stops caravans, then a contingent of Stone Giants arrives days later to destroy the supplies and everything man-made in their path.

✪ The party needs to devise a way to distract or lure the roc away to get the supplies before the Stone Giants arrive. If the party decide to battle the roc, it flees at half health and any damage dealt can carry over to Chapter 6.

✪ The party is accompanied by the lord's daughter, the reckless and brave Lavencia. Lavencia is a potential battle companion in flying combat.

The Party Chases the Dawn Titan

Purpose: Reinforce the giant threat (only use this scene if the Fire Giants are who you want your players to attack after Chapter 4).

New locations: Gauntlgrym.

Important characters: Bruenor.

Loot: 2500GP worth of jewlery.

✪ The leader of Gauntlgrym, Bruenor, requests the party join him for a feast after learning of their heroic deeds. The party are to put on their finest regalia.

✪ During the feast, the party meets a contingent of Moon Elf emisarries looking for the missing princess, Halani Meliamne. Later, Bruenor regails the Party with the story of the Dawn Tiatn that powers the forge.

✪ During the night, alarms are sounded because Drow have stolen the Dawn Titan. The guards enlist the party's help in tracking down the thieves.

✪ Run a chase scene to determine whether the party succeed in stopping the drow and retrieving the Dawn Titan.

✪ Regardless of the outcome, share the information somehow that the Fire Giant Lord wants the Dawn Titan t power his own forge.

✪ Halani Meliamne is a potential battle companion during Chapter 8.

Frost Giants!

Purpose: Reinforce the giant threat (only use this scene if the Frost Giants are who you want your players to attack after Chapter 4).

New locations: TBD.

Important characters: TBD.

Loot: TBD.

✪ TBD.

Cloud Giants!

Purpose: Reinforce the giant threat (only use this scene if the Cloud Giants are who you want your players to attack after Chapter 4).

New locations: TBD.

Important characters: TBD.

Loot: TBD.

✪ TBD.

Credits

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