

The Giant Attack

This “module” accompanies the [video found here](#), addressing chapter 2 of the adventure. It provides simple, step-by-step instructions to help you run the introductory chapter. It’s particularly useful if you want concrete guidance for this part of the adventure. There are five scenes to this module.

- ★ **Scene 1: Cold Open.** In this scene, you will give each player a brief solo scenario to play out. Each scene flows into the next player’s until all the characters have been introduced and brought together.
- ★ **Scene 2: The Plan.** This scene gives the players a brief reprieve from the action. It’s their chance to meet the important nonplayer characters (NPCs), roleplay with each other, and learn important information about their task.
- ★ **Scene 3: A Challenge.** The player characters (PCs) try to foil the giants’ goals in the town, using a non-combat approach.
- ★ **Scene 4: Battle the Boss.** The fourth scene is a showdown with the Giant Commander and minions of the chosen giant faction, probably a combat.
- ★ **Scene 5: Cutaway Epilogue.** The last scene gives the players a chance to enjoy their success and feel the adoration of the town or to experience the ignominy of defeat. It also reminds the players of the challenges to come by expanding the narrative point-of-view and revealing several different locations in the campaign.

[A GIANT TOWERS OVER A LONE WARRIOR IN THE WOODS.]

Scene 1: Cold Open

This module begins without introduction or preamble. You will thrust the players into the action and in doing so, give them a taste of the surprise and menace of a sudden giant attack. You have several goals for this scene.

- ★ Describe the peril to the town, creating tension that lasts until the final scene
- ★ Engage the players individually, drawing them into decision-making and roleplaying
- ★ Elicit an introduction and description for each character
- ★ Bring the party together by giving the characters a shared experience of danger

STEP-BY-STEP

This section gives methodical guidance for executing the scene. It's a simpler approach than the video describes. It might be useful if you're new to the game, if you don't have experience with cold opens, or if you just want to see some concrete steps.

Don't get bogged down by the formulaic nature of this instruction—add more descriptions, improvise small events, and otherwise tailor the narrative to draw the players through this scene.

1. Describe the Attack

Refer to the faction sheet and choose the faction that will attack the town. This is the same faction you will use in later parts of the adventure.

This is a significant decision. Read the faction sheet carefully before choosing.

With the giant faction selected, you can now properly describe the attack. Emphasise its suddenness, the panic of the crowd, and the inability of anyone or anything to stand in the giants' way. Be sure to characterise what the giants are after:

[THE RING OF WINTER IS MADE OF COILING IRON AND MAGICAL METALS.]

- ★ The **Hill Giants** and their minions (goblins, bugbears, and ogres) look for food. They are searching warehouses and even entering homes. They try to capture villagers dressed like bakers or fisherfolk, demanding to know where their bounty is stored. They vaguely plan to capture the town's grain silo.
- ★ The **Frost Giants** and their minions (winter wolves) are looking for an individual, the Vicar, because of his famous father. They terrorise the villagers and interrogate those they capture, demanding to know where the Vicar is hiding. Since they're not getting straight answers from the frightened villagers, they plan to search around the Vicar's temple.
- ★ The **Fire Giants** and their minions (magmin, orogs, and axe-beaks carrying orc riders) are seeking the missing piece of a giant construct. They are looking for an ancient, half-buried obelisk they think is part of the construct. They cruelly attack anyone that gets in their way.
- ★ The **Cloud Giants** and their minions (griffons and aarakocra simulacrum) are also looking for an obelisk, but this one doesn't exist; the giants are acting on false information. They search about in likely areas, destroying anything in their way.
- ★ The **Stone Giants** and their minions (human barbarians of the Bear Tribe) are on a destructive rampage. They crush, burn, or otherwise dismantle every structure in sight.

Example: Stone giants break through the wall that surrounds the town. They loom through the hole, leering down at the screaming, scattering townsfolk. The giants swing their massive clubs at any structure in reach as fur-wearing barbarians storm through the gap behind them. The towering monsters throw boulders, wagons, cows, and anything heavy, delighting in the sudden chaos. The barbarians take axes and torches to the smaller structures as they go.

2. Select a Player

Pick a player to run a vignette for (or ask for a volunteer).

A "vignette" is a short scene where only one player's character is present. It's a one-on-one interaction between you and the player.

When selecting a player (or one of multiple volunteers), choose the most outgoing player or the one best at improvising so the others can learn from this earlier example of play.

Cool Trick. Have the players sit in a group until they get their vignettes, then move them. For example, have them sit on one side of the table, then move to the other side when their vignettes are done, reinforcing the feeling of them "coming together."

3. Establish Previous Activity

Ask the selected player to (briefly) describe what their character looks like and what it's doing before the attack. Give a few examples like "shopping for something particular," "working at a profession," or "sightseeing."

Determining the character's mundane tasks and goals introduces the sort of things the character does in their free time. It also emphasises how stark the change is, going from an everyday activity to a chaotic giant attack.

If a player has trouble thinking of an activity, suggest something class related. A cleric might be visiting the sick or meeting a member of his temple. A fighter might be in the market looking for a new whetstone. The wizard might be replenishing the contents of her component pouch.

4. The Character Reacts

The character sees the giants and their minions coming this way! Describe the approaching threat and get the player's reaction. There are too many to fight and fleeing villagers stop long enough to tell the character that the militia are gathering in the town centre.

This gives everyone a chance to see how the character handles things.

- ★ The player might have a plan that is quick to implement. In this case, describe the player's plan working wonderfully, even better than expected.
- ★ If the player has no plan or simply flees with the crowd, this reveals very little about the character. In this case, engage the player with one of the "quandary" scenarios described below (or one you make up). Whatever the character's reaction, it's the right thing to do and it works great!

After the plan plays out, the PC gets swept up in the crowd, moving toward the town centre. For example, if the character's plan is to hide, it works well initially, but then the hiding place is revealed or destroyed, forcing the character to flee.

Keep in mind that each faction of giants will have different goals. The attack on the town will appear unique to that faction. Refer to the faction sheet and try to demonstrate these goals in the way you describe the actions of the giants and their minions.

When moderating these results, don't let the PC get in a direct fight. It's obvious the foes are too strong. If it looks like the player wants a direct confrontation, present a moral barrier. Perhaps a hurt child has fallen in the street and needs to be carried away from the danger.

Quandaries

This quandary appears in an obvious way, either right in front of the PC or prompted by a villager seeking help from anyone who looks competent (the player's character). Here are some sample quandaries:

- ★ A boulder hurled from the next block knocked over a merchant's wagon. The wagon has a broken wheel and now leans against the door to a building. If someone can heave the wagon back, the people in the building can escape.
- ★ "I just saw the militia sergeant go into his home—he takes a nap at this time every day. The man's deaf so he won't know of the danger! If someone can wake him, the militia will want that armoury key he keeps in his pocket."
- ★ A woman is attempting to push a cart full of her possessions and her two children. She's falling behind and the giant's minions will soon catch her. If someone can help her push

the wagon or just convince her to leave the cart and carry the children instead, the little family might be saved.

- ★ A massive frame cradles hundreds of logs being prepared for use in the upkeep of the town's outer wall. If someone can chop through the support ropes at just the right time, the frame would break under the weight of the logs, causing them to crash into the street and cut off pursuit by some of the giants' smaller allies.
- ★ The door of a high-end trinket shop swings in the breeze, its occupants having fled. If an enterprising thief were to duck inside for just a moment or two, who knows what precious knickknacks could be scooped up?
- ★ "You look like a fast runner! Can you race up this belltower and start ringing the bell? Yes, I know that sounds dangerous, what with the giants throwing boulders and all, but people on the far side of town should be warned!"

5. The Crowd Flees!

As the crowd moves toward the town centre, it's time for the next player's vignette.

- ★ If every player has already had an individual scene, **move on to step 6**.
- ★ Otherwise, select the next player then describe the approaching threat and the fleeing crowd. Among the crowd are the characters of those players who already had vignettes. These are recognizable as adventurers by their clothes or mannerisms, or they seem unique among the crowd as looking like they can defend themselves. **Return to step 2**.

6. Transition to the Next Scene

When the vignettes conclude, the crowd arrives at the town centre and sees various officials and militia members assembling. Continue to scene 2.

[THE VICAR STANDS DRESSED IN BROWN FURS AND ROBES.]

Scene 2: The Plan

In this scene, the players get a moment to rest. This break from the action allows roleplaying among the players and the NPCs who represent the town. However, the players should not lose sight of the fact that the giants are still rampaging somewhere in the town.

You have several goals for this scene.

- ★ Solidify the group as a “party” by giving the characters a common cause, a shared task and goal
- ★ Showcase important NPC personalities, creating a sense of the town as a larger community
- ★ Provide exposition to contextualise the giant attack, foreshadowing the campaign’s central tension
- ★ Provide information upon which the party can act immediately to save the town
- ★ Get the party to produce a plan of action or have the NPCs provide one

THE CAST

When the crowd arrives at the town’s centre, various NPCs will try to get the villagers organised and under control, moving most of them toward the far side of town. The rest (including the PCs) get swept up in an impromptu planning session.

If one or more of the players seem like they’ll wander off, have important NPCs question them as “witnesses,” drawing them into the larger conversation about what to do next.

This module assumes you’ve selected the Vicar as the important NPC to lump in with the party, so much of the exposition is described as coming from him. If you want to use another NPC, replace any references to the Vicar.

THE INFORMATION

During this planning session, NPCs present several key pieces of information. This comes in small, quick revelations—remember, the giants are still rampaging in another part of the town!

The following information should come out, from various sources.

- ★ There are a few recent reports of giant sightings—the creatures have been seen elsewhere in the region and there’s a report of a giant attack elsewhere
- ★ Not all giants are cruel, nor are they indifferent to the fate of the “small folk,” though something seems to be upsetting them

- ➊ The Vicar has heard from another priest of his order and—in context of this attack—believes the giants are being affected by some sort of religious upheaval
- ➋ A sharp-eyed villager saw (or overheard) the giants or their minions during the early part of the attack and now reveals what the giants are here specifically to do. (See the faction sheet for details.) If you’ve managed to reveal some of this during the vignettes, your players will hopefully chime in with corroborating information, drawing the party further into the conversation

The most important information here is the thing the giants are after and how the party (and perhaps a competent NPC or two) can act together to stop it. Knowing this allows the players (or an NPC) to produce a concrete plan.

THE PLAN OF ACTION

The “planning” begins with NPCs throwing out ideas. Something must be done! The villagers will shout down the worst of these plans, ideas like everyone fleeing the town. Hopefully, the players will produce a useful plan based on some of the villager’s ideas. If not, the Vicar has a good idea to fall back upon.

- ➊ If the players create a plan, go with it. Even an outlandish plan should have a good chance of success. Do the players need special tools or resources to make their plan happen? Well, it happens that someone in the crowd knows how to get those things. Because a player-made plan will be more engaging, make sure the party gets what they need to have a fair shot at success.
- ➋ After the villagers have thrown out some ideas, the players might still need help. In this case, the Vicar will propose that he and the party acquire some “special” catapult munitions stored outside town, a wagonload of barrels packed with dangerous alchemy. (See “The Vicar’s Plan,” below.)

Whether the plan is the players’ or is produced by NPCs, use the mechanisms described in the Skill Challenges text box as a template, assigning skills and outcomes to match the players’ plan.

When the party has a fully formed plan, the important NPCs endorse it. They explicitly recognize the PCs as adventurers and expect great things from the party. One of the important NPCs will tell the group that their reputation is riding on this. For example, someone could say, “If you pull this off, you’ll be famous! What? No, if you fail, I don’t think the dead will be singing your praises.”

Skill Challenges

In the core rules, a “group check” is performed by every member of the party, requiring half or more to succeed for the group check to succeed. A *skill challenge* is a version that adds complications:

Although you propose the “correct” ability and skill for the check, any player who can sufficiently justify using a different ability or skill to achieve that goal may roll the proposed check instead.

The party must succeed on multiple group checks—a number that you decide—before failing that many group checks. In each group check, you can change the default ability and skill if you wish, assigning a different sub-goal for that phase of the task.

For an example of skill challenges in play, see “The Vicar’s Plan.”

Scene 3: A Challenge

Run the skill challenge as described in the text box or use the sample mission here.

You have several goals in this scene.

- ★ Give the players a sense that they are working together as a party
- ★ Acclimate the players to thinking up alternate approaches to mundane tasks
- ★ Signal that success and failure aren’t always absolute; this outcome merely affects the final conflict and it changes the town’s feelings about the party

THE VICAR’S PLAN

In this sample mission, the Vicar leads the party out of town to a warehouse owned by the Vicar’s temple. The explosive barrels stored there are too volatile to keep within the walls. The wagon is still there because the giants attacked suddenly and without warning.

If the party can bring the wagon back in time, the catapult can load the caustic munitions to drive back the giants and their minions. The militia hasn’t been successful with normal catapult shots; when the giants see a stone coming in, they simply catch it and throw it back!

This is a three-phase skill challenge where the players try to return with the wagonload of volatile chemicals before the catapult is overrun. A 10 DC is appropriate for each check.

- ★ **Get to the Warehouse:** Dexterity (Stealth) checks to sneak through the back alleys to the western gate.

The party must get past roving groups of the giants' minions. If the group check fails, the party has backtracked too often to avoid being caught, losing time.

- ★ **Manage the Wagon:** Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks to bring in the oxen from the pen, hook them to the wagon, and get moving back into the city.

The oxen aren't often called upon to perform their hauling duties. Failing this group check means the cantankerous creatures are difficult to gather and harness, costing precious time..

- ★ **Get to the Catapult:** Charisma (Deception) checks for individual party members to distract the giants' minions, leading them on a merry chase through back alleys so the wagon can pass by

The munitions are volatile, so the wagon must use the smooth road. There's no time to take significant detours; the enemy must be drawn away from key intersections before the wagon can proceed.

Bonus. With the Vicar along, you can put your thumb on the scales. If you think the party needs help, count this NPC as a participant in the skill challenge. In this case, the Vicar always succeeds on his individual checks because he has experience overseeing the transfer of these munitions. This makes it more likely that the group succeeds in each phase.

Failing a group check means the party performs that portion of the task too slowly. Use this moment to ratchet up the tension. Somehow, the party discovers that the giants are closer to the catapult than anticipated for this phase of the plan. Failing another check means the giants arrive first, destroying the catapult and ruining the plan; the party will have to face the final conflict without help from the ancient siege weapon.

If the players succeed on two or three of the group checks, the wagon gets to the catapult on time and the militia use the caustic munitions to drive back most of the giants and their minions. The PCs are heroes, celebrated by the town. One of the PCs receives a smoke grenade that will be of use later.

Scene 4: Battle the Boss

Whatever the outcome of the skill challenge, the party now gets important news. A villager who was at the planning meeting finds the party and tells them that the Giant Commander is in an isolated location away from most of its minions. There's no time to gather the militia; the party has one chance to strike the head from the snake. If the players refuse to engage with this opportunity, contrive a way to have the Giant Commander attack the players. You have several goals in this scene.

- ★ Let the players practice combat in a way that won't end in their deaths
- ★ Use the Battle Companion System, showing how NPCs can help without getting in the way
- ★ Show that the giants can be defeated despite their previously described power

THE PLACE

The party hurries to an abandoned structure in the outskirts of the town. The giants have made a "forward operating base" in that location. (See the attached combat map.)

Each giant faction is doing something different there. Place enemies on the map in a way that accords with that faction's use of the space, then determine the PCs' starting locations.

- ★ The **Hill Giants** are using the location as a collection point for stolen food. Minions are in the western end of the building, trying to fix the old wagons to help them carry off their plunder.
- ★ The **Frost Giants** have gathered a dozen important-looking villagers to question, penning them into the western end of the building. Minions are bringing the prisoners to the north side of the building for interrogation.
- ★ The **Fire Giants** are also interested in repairing the wagons in the western end of the structure. They're planning to lay the obelisk across the two for easier long-distance hauling. The orogs are arguing that the orcs' mounts should pull the wagons, but the orcs think orogs should do it.
- ★ The **Cloud Giants** made a defensible outpost here so they can debate whether they are acting on false reports about the obelisk. Their minions perch on the rooftop, watching the debate.
- ★ The **Stone Giants**' minions, being humans, have asked that this building be preserved for logistical reasons. The giants have grown impatient and are only now deciding they should destroy the building instead of sparing it. The minions are busy fleeing from the structure's various exits as the PCs arrive.

THE PARTICIPANTS

This is a conflict between the party, the Giant Commander and the giants' minions. Regardless of which faction attacks the town, we're using set stat blocks for the Giant Commander and minions. Although this does reduce the fidelity of our story, this is a design choice for game balance,

Bonus. The Vicar is a battle companion, able to assist in combat with his Rad Feature. (See the Battle Companions System for details.) The Healer's Help feature is thematic for a priest. However, you should give him a different Rad Feature if that would best cover some deficiency in the party's abilities.

If the party has avoided taking the Vicar along, he is the NPC who arrives to describe the location of the Giant Commander. He tries to insert himself into the party again by leading them to that area.

THE CONFLICT

With the battlefield laid out, use grid-based combat or theatre of the mind techniques to play out the conflict, whichever works best for your group.

Bonus. If the catapult was saved in the prior scene, one of the players possesses a single grenade that creates coloured smoke. Throwing the grenade calls in a shot from the distant catapult using the last of the special munitions the players delivered. At the end of the round after the grenade is thrown, centre an effect on that location (the equivalent of a *fireball* spell, but with a damage type of "acid").

The enemies won't try to get away from the smoke grenade because they won't understand its significance. If the foes do move around before the exploding barrel arrives, you can shift the point where the shot lands, ensuring a "heroic impact." This is a reward for succeeding on the skill challenge so make sure the catapult's inaccuracy works in the players' favour.

Failsafe. If the party is losing, perhaps half their number falling unconscious, you can turn the tide dramatically. A minion arrives at the battle scene and yells its news to the giants; they've accomplished their goal and they should pull out before the town's militia (now armed and ready) reach this location. At this point, the giant's make a fighting retreat, escaping if the remaining PCs allow it or finishing the battle on their way out if the players decide to interfere.

Scene Option. Although the players probably recognise this as a combat encounter, you shouldn't foreclose the possibility of a parlay. Even if it breaks down into combat, a conversation can be a good chance to drop more details about the giants and their faction goals. If the party seems bent on talking the giants into a resolution, feel free to reward good arguments and roleplaying, perhaps using a Charisma-based skill challenge to convince the giants to leave. Even if the party attacks initially, the chance for parlay—initiated by either side—may present itself at some point in the fighting.

[A RUINED BUILDING IS GIRT BY SNOW.
THIS IS A BATTLEMAP.]

Scene 5: Cutaway Epilogue

At the end of every session in this campaign, you should consider doing a cutaway epilogue. If you imagine the story's point-of-view as a camera in a movie, this epilogue moves the camera all over the world to show little snippets of information to the players which the characters aren't privy to. The goal of this epilogue is to reinforce the themes of Storm King's Thunder and foreshadow upcoming characters and events.

The brisk air smells of woodsmoke, and if you closed your eyes and somehow managed to ignore the shouting of fading battle, the scent might even be pleasant, but your heart drumming in your ears and adrenaline pulsing through your veins keeps you grounded in the moment. Indignant crows caw and flap away, carrying aloft whatever grisly bit they could wrest from the many corpses in the village. The immediate threat is over, and the village will spend months rebuilding, recovering, but they'll remember the part you played in their defence — you have allies here. Sirrac, the local priest, clasps one of you on the shoulder and promises to aid you in any way he can if you're on the path of stopping this giant threat.

Elsewhere, with moonlight spilling across the frigid, icy ground, traveling through a dazzling display of crystalline reflections, a lone Frost Giant adventurer feels the weight of his ancestors and the All-Father compelling him to a holy temple, and the oracle within.

Elsewhere, on a lavish boat, crowded with celebrating patrons, shouting, laughing, gambling, far below deck, a troubled captain spins an ornate coin on their desk. The coin depicts a coiling leviathan. The captain slams their palm on the desk to quiet the whirring coin and they prepare to commune with their master.

Elsewhere, beneath the ocean, in a hidden stronghold, a young woman, 25-foot tall, seems less imposing on the Storm Giants' Wyrmskull Throne, doubled over in a moment grief. The seats in the royal hall reserved for her immediate family are empty, and she mourns their uncertain fates, while her kin and cousins rampage in the realms of the small folk.

But standing behind her, an older Storm Giant woman reaches out with reassuring a blue hand to clasp the Princess Regent's shoulder, sparks occasionally crackling between her ringed fingers. And on the older woman's face, dragon-scale diadem resting on her head, a smile creeps across her features. Everything is going to plan.

[A SNOWY BUILDING IN BRYN SHANDER IS SURROUNDED BY TREES.]

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