

TYRANNY OF DRAGONS

FROZEN CASTLE

An Expansion for *Rise of Tiamat* for 10th and 11th level characters
By Alexander Winter



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FROZEN CASTLE

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The loss of Skyreach Castle in *Hoard of the Dragon Queen* was a major setback to the Cult of the Dragon, but still only a setback. The cult is determined to retake the castle and claim Tiamat's lost treasure buried in its frozen walls and cloudstuff vaults, but they aren't the only ones. Blagothkus the cloud giant is still the master of Skyreach, and he has gone to the hall of his cousin Brunvild, ice lord of Uldoveld, for the resources to repair and reoccupy the castle. At the same time, the party is dispatched by the Council of Waterdeep to reclaim some of the stolen treasures lost when the castle fell.

This episode assumes that Skyreach Castle was brought to ground in *Hoard of the Dragon Queen*, either in a controlled descent or a crash after its controls failed. In the most likely outcome of that adventure, the giant spirit that controls Skyreach Castle guided the fortress to the Miklos Glacier, far into the frozen North.

If you did not play *Hoard of the Dragon Queen*, assume that Skyreach Castle was crashed by another group of adventurers who died in the fight against the cult. If you did play the previous adventure but Skyreach Castle and the cloud giant Blagothkus did not meet the fate assumed here, adjust this episode as needed.

"The Frozen Castle" can also be played as a standalone adventure for a careful party of 10th level characters, or a more reckless party of 11th level characters.

ALLIES OF CONVENIENCE

"The Frozen Castle" is meant to be a get-in/get-out scenario, built around locations offering both environmental hazards and deadly creature encounters. For the episode to be a success, the characters need to ally with a group that can provide shelter, help them repair the damage done during the crash, and fill out the crew needed for Skyreach Castle to fly once more.

The most helpful possible allies—but perhaps not the most obvious—are the giants Blagothkus and Brunvild. Although giants rarely support alliances with the tiny races of Faerûn, both leaders rage against the idea of the dragons gaining ascendance. If these leaders can be convinced that the party is strong enough to aid the giants, both can make valuable contributions to the final encounter against the forces of Tiamat.

If the characters do not seek out the giants, a clan of dwarves in the remote colony of Mkoz can also

repair and crew the castle, if given appropriate time and incentives. As well, an arcane naturalist studying a colony of yetis in the mountains can repair some of the damage to Skyreach Castle, and the yetis can make a serviceable crew if properly trained. As a more desperate measure, the party might recruit the orc servants of the giants, who could be induced to rise up against their masters and serve the characters. They are of no help in repairing the flying castle, however, and make a dangerously unpredictable barbaric crew.

THE MIKLOS GLACIER


The Miklos Glacier is a towering ice shelf tucked into a crook in the Spine of the World Mountains. From a low, solitary peak known as Promontory, the glacier extends forty miles to the south before falling off as a sheer cliff.

TRAVEL ON THE GLACIER

Characters without adequate cold-weather gear, provisions, and magic can be easily thwarted in any attempt to traverse the Miklos Glacier. Even on the sunniest days, the temperature rises above 0 degrees Fahrenheit only in the afternoon, giving characters only 4 hours of safe travel time. Any creature on the glacier at any other time must make a DC 10 Constitution check every hour or suffer one level of exhaustion. Creatures without adequate protection automatically fail this check.

Spells such as *protection from energy* or *Leomund's tiny hut* can prove invaluable to characters dealing with extreme cold. If no character has access to such magic, the leaders of the Council of Waterdeep can make scrolls available to the party.

Thick snow cover on the glacier makes any location that isn't sheltered into difficult terrain. Without some means of traversing difficult terrain, characters can move only 5 miles per day, assuming they move only when the temperature is above 0 degrees. That increases to 10 miles per day with snowshoes and 15 miles per day with skis. Over each hour of travel, there is a 30 percent chance that visibility is lightly obscured by blowing wind and snow. This has no effect on travel time, but should be rolled for during random encounters.



The glacier can be accessed from the west by way of a pass in the Spine of the World Mountains, or by scaling the ice cliffs in the south. The western pass runs close to the orc village of Broken Tusk, and that approach is likely to draw the orcs' attention.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

The seemingly barren expanse of the Miklos Glacier is home to a variety of deadly creatures. While the characters are traveling across the glacier, roll a d20 every six hours. On a roll of 18–20, an encounter occurs. Roll on the table to determine the specifics.

Miklos Glacier Encounters

D8 RANDOM ENCOUNTERS (DAY)

- 1 A herd of elk or caribou
- 2 2d8 orc hunters
- 3 2d6 winter wolves
- 4 1d6 frost giants
- 5 A caravan of dwarves headed to or from Mkoz
- 6 An abandoned tent, its owner missing
- 7 1 remorhaz
- 8 1 polar bear

D4 RANDOM ENCOUNTERS (NIGHT)

- 1 2d6 winter wolves
- 2 1d6 frost giants
- 3 1d2 remorhazes
- 4 A hungry yeti family; not hostile if food is offered

ADVENTURE LOCATIONS

This part of the adventure is a sandbox-style episode in which the characters can explore different areas, interact with different NPCs, and choose their own best course for success. The characters' objective is to reclaim Skyreach Castle and arrange an alliance with a faction that can help them escape with it. This section details various locations on or near the Miklos Glacier and the NPCs and creatures the adventurers might meet there.

1. BROKEN TUSK

This orc village is situated near the western pass leading to the glacier through the Spine of the World Mountains. The Broken Tusk orcs came to this area nearly fifty years before in great numbers, plundering the holds of the dwarves of Mkoz. However, when the frost giants came and slew the orcs' leaders, the great jarl Brunhild (father of Brunvild) took command of the orc clans.

Broken Tusk's population fluctuates between two hundred and seven hundred orcs, all loyal to the giants. The orcs make regular raids against Mkoz, though they have so far failed to breach its defenses. Left to their own devices, they would have long since moved on to easier pickings, but the giants keep them focused on the dwarven stronghold for their own ends.

Many orcs are increasingly unhappy with the giants' leadership, but Brunvild, the current jarl, has successfully quashed all challenge and rebellion. Some orcs suspect that the giants are behind the occasional disasters that strike Broken Tusk, from surprise dwarf attacks to increased predation by remorhazes.

The Broken Tusk orcs hate outsiders. Anyone approaching the village and not accompanied by a giant or atop a remorhaz will be attacked on sight. If the characters come to the village in the company of a giant, charm an orc into vouching for them, or devise some other means of detente, the orcs show little interest in any offer except weapons and armor. What little steel they have has been stolen from the dwarves—or, more usually, given to them by the giants who received it as tribute from the dwarves.

Many orc warriors are retainers at Uldoveld. If the giants agree to aid the party, orcs will be brought along as combat fodder to spare unnecessary giant losses.

Gru-Nar Bloodhandle, Broken Tusk Chieftain

The Broken Tusks reckon their tribe's beginning with the great warlord Gru-Nar Bloodhandle, and every chieftain since has claimed his name and title. The current Gru-Nar was the strongest of the warriors that survived the most recent assault on Mkoz. He hates the frost giants even more than the dwarves, but knows that the giants will kill him at the first sign of dissent.

Gru-Nar knows that as long as Brunvild lives, the orcs will never be free. If the adventurers were to slay the frost giant jarl, the orc chieftain will commit his people to the characters' cause. Though the orcs can contribute nothing toward repairing Skyreach Castle, they can provide a sturdy crew—but only with promises of destruction and regular plunder to come.

If Gru-Nar comes to a bad end before the end of this episode but needs to reappear, another orc claims the title of Broken Tusk chieftain, and adds the Gru-Nar title to his own. Each future Gru-Nar has a virtually identical outlook to his or her predecessor, though successive leaders are even less friendly toward non-orcs.

2. MKOZ

A clan of dwarves established this mining outpost and stronghold atop the Miklos Glacier. From deep tunnels beneath the ice, they extract iron, precious metals, and gems. The dwarves of Mkoz have developed an uneasy truce with the giants, knowing that the giants keep the number of orcs at Broken Tusk under control. They also permit trade caravans to travel between Mkoz and larger dwarven settlements without harassment—as long as the dwarves provide tribute of sapphires, silver, and steel. When the giants decide that tribute is insufficient, they unleash the orcs' fury, but only enough to keep the dwarves in their place.

Mkoz is home to some 500 shield dwarves led by Durro Thuldoun, a grim and distrustful warrior.

The dwarves do not open their halls to strangers, for they know the giants are devious and cunning. If the characters were to slay Gru-Nar or Brunvild, the dwarves become a great deal friendlier—especially if the adventurers prove they have the support of Mithral Hall (by way of the writ received in the “Council of Waterdeep” episode). The markets of Mkoz can provide any goods from the *Player's Handbook*.

Even if the adventurers gain leave to enter Mkoz, however, enlisting the dwarves to help repair Skyreach Castle is a challenge. The dwarves will not leave their halls unless their frost giant foes are dispersed. The only way that happens is if the characters kill either of the giants Blagothkus or Brunvild. If the dwarves are successfully enlisted, they can provide fifty able workers to crew Skyreach Castle, and their clerics can purge the castle's controls of the giant spirit within (see *Hoard of the Dragon Queen*).



3. ULDOVELD

Uldoveld is the mead hall of Brunvild, a powerful frost giant jarl and the chief chieftain of the Broken Tusk orcs. Uldoveld is built out of ice on a low hill and enclosed by an ice stockade. The hall is large enough to house several hundred frost giants, but only a dozen frost giants and two dozen orcs are presently in residence, attending to Brunvild.

Dozens of smaller ice structures and temporary huts stand outside the great mead hall, many housing hill giants and ogres that have come to Uldoveld at Brunvild's request. Nearly a hundred giants are currently camped here, along with fifty orcs busying themselves with tasks the giants don't care to do.

Blagothkus

If the **cloud giant** Blagothkus survived *Hoard of the Dragon Queen*, he has come from the Skyreach Castle crash site to seek Brunvild's aid in getting the castle airborne once more. Fortunately for the characters, Blagothkus pays little attention to humanoids. He doesn't recognize the characters as those who assaulted his castle unless they reintroduce themselves.

Blagothkus supports the Cult of the Dragon, but only as a means to uniting all giants against the dragons. He believes that only when the giants have a strong enough foe to fight will they earn back the love of their god Annam, father of the giants. However, even though the cloud giant has reservations about helping the dragons, he is even less interested in helping humanoids.

Brunvild

The frost giant Brunvild is a legendary warrior, whose wild beard is knotted with the skulls and bones of humanoids that intruded upon his lands. Also woven into his beard is a silver bracelet set with a complex pattern of stylized horses and lions. Brunvild and his brother **Storvirk** wore matching bracelets in their beards as trophies. Storvirk disappeared many

years ago while hunting a dragon; his remains and the matching bracelet can be found in Arauthator's iceberg in the *Tyranny of Dragons: Hoard of the Dragon Queen* episode "The Sea of Moving Ice."

Brunvild hates all dragons, and he has no faith in Blagothkus's idea of aiding the cult as a means of uniting giantkind. He is thoroughly evil, however, and has no interest in or sympathy for the fate of Faerûn's humanoids if Tiamat returns. He views humanoids as little better than animals, using them if convenient and ignoring them the rest of the time—but destroying them if they present a threat.

In that same vein, though, Brunvild has a certain respect for the best among the puny races, in the way a rider holding the whip might admire a magnificent warhorse. If the frost giant can find a way to put such a beast to work for him, he will—and that's how he perceives the characters if they approach him. See "Convincing the Giants," below, for more information.



4. GLAZHAEL'S RETREAT

Glazhael is the white dragon charged with protecting the treasure the cult was transporting aboard Skyreach Castle. It is likely that Glazhael escaped during *Hoard of the Dragon Queen*, simply flying away in the face of danger and the castle's crash. He then followed the descent of the castle before flying south to send word of its location to the cult. (If Glazhael was killed in the previous adventure, replace him with another cult-allied dragon that was passing over the glacier when Skyreach Castle fell.)

When Glazhael returned, he brought back a squad of cultists on his back. They have since been joined by more cult reinforcements, leaving nearly two dozen cultists presently camped within sight of the crash site. The cult has also approached the Broken Tusks about an alliance against the giants, offering them the chance to raid in richer lands to the south. See "Showdown," below, for details.

While the cultists plan their assault, the dragon has taken up residence in a fissure at the base of Miklos Glacier. This location likely won't factor into the episode, though the characters might see the dragon flying in the distance from time to time, scouting the castle and activity at Uldoveld.

If Glazhael notices the adventurers as they traverse the glacier, he might take the opportunity to attack if the party is camped in the open. However, the dragon will flee quickly if the fight goes against him.

5. PROMONTORY PEAK

A werebear named Dalo lives on this lonely mountain, shunning all visitors. He turns the characters away if they approach him, saying they'd best get back to civilized places before they get themselves killed. If the characters are injured or obviously ill prepared for exploring the glacier, Dalo begrudgingly lets them stay in his cave lodgings. He doesn't ask questions and expects the same. He can provide cold-weather gear and food, but only if the characters agree to immediately return to civilization where they won't get themselves killed.

If the adventurers' relationship to the Emerald Enclave comes up, Dalo is more receptive. Delaan, the order's Waterdeep delegate, has visited Dalo often, though he hasn't seen the ranger in many years. He is more willing to let friends of a friend stay the night, though, and if the adventurers speak of their mission, Dalo gives them the lay of the land.

Dalo dislikes the dwarves of Mzok, seeing them as greedy. He dislikes Allac at the yeti colonies because he views the wizard as meddling in the natural order. He

hates the orcs and giants, and ends up chasing Broken Tusks off his mountain every once in a while. Though he will not join the characters on their mission, he can provide a detailed description of all the locations in this episode.

6. YETI COLONIES

The yetis of the Miklos Glacier have dwelled here for generations. A few years ago, an eccentric human wizard named Allac came to the glacier to study remorhazes, but he quickly changed his focus when he discovered the yetis living in rough settlements, in contrast to the bestial lifestyle of most of their kind.

The yetis live in small family units or in solitude. Allac moves between familial groups, entrancing them with his magic to overcome their reclusive nature and hostility. He tends their wounds with his healing skill, and the yetis have come to view him as something of a guardian spirit. Though he has shared with them the secrets of fire and tools, the yetis have taken only to building and using stone hammers, which they use to crack bones for their marrow.


The yetis hunt caribou and other animals that come onto the glacier, but will attack orc hunting packs if game is scarce. Orc patrols make it a priority to kill any lone yeti they see.

Allac

Allac is a 9th-level chaotic good wizard with a great white beard and wild hair down to his waist. The furs he wears are white ermine, which combine with his beard and hair to give him something of the

Helping Hand

If the players don't have a solid grounding in the long history of enmity between giants and dragons in Faerûn, one of the giants summoned to Uldoveld is a **chaotic good storm giant** named Oromis. Oromis takes it upon himself to declare the characters members of his personal entourage, granting them a measure of status among the other giants. He explains the complex history of giantkind and the giants' ancient hatred of dragons, and summarizes the divisions among the giants regarding what should be done about Tiamat's return. This should give the players a sense of the diplomatic options available to them as they seek the giants' aid.



appearance of a yeti himself. He claims to have learned a great deal from the yetis, but any conversation with Allac shows that the solitude of the glacier has taken its toll on his mind.

The wizard is happy to help the party by performing the necessary repairs to Skyreach Castle, but he wants a favor in return. Having tried and failed to prevent the yetis from hunting orcs, he seeks a way to stop the orcs from killing yetis in retaliation. He wants the characters to plant a remorhaz egg in the orc village, then somehow alert the giants to this. The giants prize such eggs and forbid the orcs from possessing them, fearing that the orcs might train remorhazes to fight against them. The discovery of an egg in Broken Tusk would bring the giants down on the orcs harshly, driving them from the glacier.

With Allac's help, thirty yetis can be trained to crew Skyreach Castle. They have few demands beyond food and humane treatment, although they are not a disciplined crew.

7. REMORHAZ MATING GROUND

A series of gradually rising hills define the northwest edge of Miklos Glacier. This area is a remorhaz mating ground, featuring dozens of the creatures burrowed deep into icy lairs where they guard their eggs. Each burrow is home to a mated pair of **remorhazes**, one of which goes out to hunt and bring back food while the other keeps the eggs in the lair warm. If an egg is exposed to the frigid cold of the glacier for more than a minute, the remorhaz within the egg dies.

A remorhaz lair is tunneled into drifting snow and the glacial ice beneath, making it difficult to find. A lair's entrance constantly fills up with snow, though the remorhazes know instinctively where to burrow down again. Finding a lair entrance requires a successful DC 22 Intelligence (Investigation) check, after which four hours of digging are needed to reach the main lair beneath the ice. Characters who follow a hunting remorhaz back to its lair and wait for it to burrow through the snow automatically find the lair.

Once in the ice, a lair tunnel descends sixty feet at an angle before opening into a wide chamber. One remorhaz is always in the lair; both remorhazes are present 20 percent of the time.

A remorhaz egg is a blue-gray sphere three feet across and weighing two hundred pounds. The writhing insectoid shape of a growing remorhaz can be faintly seen within it. If exposed to extreme cold for

more than one minute, the young in the egg dies. A remorhaz egg must be kept in proximity to significant heat, such as that emitted by an adult remorhaz.

8. ELEMENTAL VENTS

In ancient times, a wizard came to explore the glacier but was overwhelmed by the cold. In a panic to prevent freezing to death, he attempted to conjure a fire elemental, but a strange wild magic effect caused him to instead create a series of elemental vents within the glacier. Fire and water elementals emerge from the vents at regular intervals, roaming the area for a day or two before fading away as new elementals are spawned. The elementals attack if threatened, but they leave the characters alone if they are ignored.

These magical vents have restorative and protective properties against the glacial cold. Any creature that enters an elemental vent can spend Hit Dice as if it had taken a short rest, and gains the effect of a *protection from energy* (cold) spell for 1 hour. The adventurers can rest here without tents or magic if they so choose.

9. THE FALLEN CASTLE

When Skyreach Castle crashed, it left a massive crater in the glacier. Splintered ice spikes and bits of stone are strewn about in the snow, along with cloudstuff that has solidified into ice and frozen the castle fast. The same cloudstuff continues to spread across the snow, creating a blinding blizzard around the ruins. Most of the lower courtyard was crushed by the impact, but the upper courtyard and iceberg core were preserved.

If the cloud giant Blagothkus survived *Hoard of the Dragon Queen*, he survived the crash as well, but was forced to travel to Uldoveld in search of a new crew and the resources to repair the castle. Four ogres that survived the impact have been left behind as guards. The white dragon Glazrael and its cultist allies have so far refrained from attacking the castle because of the siege weapons in the upper courtyard, which Glazrael is unwilling to face without more cultist backup.

The treasure from *Hoard of the Dragon Queen* is still inside, as are any other treasures the party didn't loot.

Repairing the Castle

Four things must be done to get Skyreach Castle flying again, although only the first three are absolutely necessary. The castle must first be dug out of the iceberg, leaving it free to rise. The steering tower must then be taken over, either with or without the cooperation of its giant spirit. Once the castle is excavated and under control, its levitation magic must be repaired. Finally, a crew is needed to defend the castle as it flies.

Digging Out

The cloudstuff of the walls has filled the impact crater and frozen the castle in place. The ice must be dug out faster than it forms, requiring the labor of at least thirty medium or fifteen large creatures working over the course of a week. A team of ten water or fire elementals can also do the job if they can be summoned. Because cloudstuff continually forms ice, even after the castle is dug out, it will be completely buried again in one month if it does not take to the air.

Controlling the Castle

At the heart of Skyreach Castle is the spirit of the last giant to die within its walls, which guides the fortress and controls its propulsion and buoyancy. Because the castle was crashed at the hands of humanoids, it is difficult at best to gain the spirit's cooperation, even if the adventurers were not directly involved. If Blagothkus was killed in *Hoard of the Dragon Queen*,

he is the resident spirit, and he absolutely refuses to engage with any humanoids.

If Blagothkus lives, his wife Esclarotta is the resident spirit. Though she is equally unwilling to help the party, she hates the dragons much more than her husband. If the characters explain the struggle against Tiamat and succeed on a DC 22 Charisma (Persuasion) check, she grants them possession of the castle. Addressing her in Giant adds a +3 bonus to this check. If the characters manage to win Brunvild as an ally, success is automatic.

If the characters cannot convince the spirit to help them, flying the castle is harder. Damage to the controls in the steering chamber means that anyone can manually operate the command runes that fly the

Controlling the Castle

Touching one of the glowing runes in the steering tower issues a specific command to the spirit controlling Skyreach Castle's flight. There are eighteen command runes.

Alarm. A noise akin to a howling wind alerts all non-deafened creatures in the castle.

All Clear. A noise akin to a loud whisper signals an end to danger.

Anchor. The castle holds position on the ground or in the air. The castle remains stationary despite winds, storms, and so on.

Cast Off. The castle is no longer anchored.

Drift. The castle drifts on the wind, effectively under no one's control.

Home. The castle returns to its place of origin in the Spine of the World Mountains.

North, South, East, and West. The castle moves in the specified cardinal direction. Touching two runes simultaneously can move the castle in other directions; for example, touching the north and east runes at the same time moves the castle northeast.

Rise. The castle ascends at a rate of 10 feet per round.

Sink. The castle descends at a rate of 10 feet per round. If it comes into contact with the ground, it lands.

Spin. The castle rotates gently clockwise, completing one full rotation in 1 minute.

Widdershins. The castle rotates gently counterclockwise, completing one full rotation in one minute.

Veil. Foggy cloudstuff materializes around the castle.

After one minute, all creatures and objects in outdoor areas within 100 feet of the castle are heavily obscured, and all creatures and objects in indoor areas are lightly obscured.

Unveil. Foggy cloudstuff engulfing the castle dissipates. Lightly obscured areas become clear in 1 round, and heavily obscured areas become lightly obscured for 1 minute, then become clear.

Storm. The clouds around the castle darken and churn, becoming rumbling thunderclouds over a period of 1 minute. Until then, the calm rune cannot be activated. Once the thunderclouds have fully formed, the creature that activated the storm rune can use its action while standing in the steering chamber to target one creature it can see with a lightning bolt. The bolt has a range of 1,000 feet and can target one creature or unattended object. A creature targeted by the bolt must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (4d10) lightning damage. An unattended object targeted by the bolt simply takes the damage (no saving throw).

Calm. The thunderclouds around the castle abate over a period of 1 minute. During this time, the storm rune cannot be reactivated.



CONVINCING THE GIANTS

castle. However, doing so successfully requires a DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check, and the spirit considers this an act of hijacking. A failed check locks out the controls for one day. A character who speaks Giant receives a +3 bonus to this check.

Even if the characters can assert control over the spirit, the castle needs constant control from a knowledgeable operator to maintain course and altitude. Each change of operator requires a new Intelligence (Arcana) check, and without an operator, the castle begins drifting. If the characters are hijackers, the spirit puts the drifting castle into free fall and lets it plummet back to the ground. Any creature on the castle when it hits takes falling damage. Moreover, the damage to the castle from a second fall requires months of specialized magical repairs and tens of thousands of gold pieces to fix.

Magical Repairs

The magic that levitated Skyreach Castle was damaged in the crash. Repairing the damaged castle requires three castings of control weather and levitate over five days, combined with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check made each day. On a failed check, the complicated ritual is extended by another day. If the adventurers do not have these spells, they must rely on allies.

Because the giants built the fortress, Blagothkus, Brunvild, or Oromis (see the “Helping Hand” sidebar) can repair the damage. Alternatively, Allac is a powerful mage with mastery of both required spells. The dwarves of Mkoz have no wizards and no cleric powerful enough to cast *control weather*, but if given two months of time, they can engineer mechanical repairs to augment what remains of the castle’s magical flight systems. In all cases, the services of these NPCs require diplomacy and favors on the part of the adventurers.

Finding a Crew

Having crewmembers on board isn’t strictly necessary for the operation of Skyreach Castle, as even a single character can operate the controls in the steering tower. However, without proper defenses, a determined airborne enemy can easily take control of the castle. See “Showdown,” below, for details.

The giants are more receptive to a humanoid alliance than the characters might expect, and are probably the easiest potential ally to convince. Most of the giants who want to help the dragons do so only from the perspective promoted by Blagothkus, and they are a clear minority among giantkind.

If the characters attempt to negotiate an alliance with Brunvild, he scoffs at the idea at first, saying that only other giants may enter into an alliance with giants. For characters who insist that they are worthy, he offers a choice of three challenges: choosing a champion to wrestle a giant, imbibing a horn full of spirit mead and awaiting a vision in the bitter cold, or stealing a coveted remorhaz egg. If the characters complete the challenge, they not only earn the giants’ respect but are given giant names—treated not just as worthy allies, but as spirit giants born into small but mighty frames.

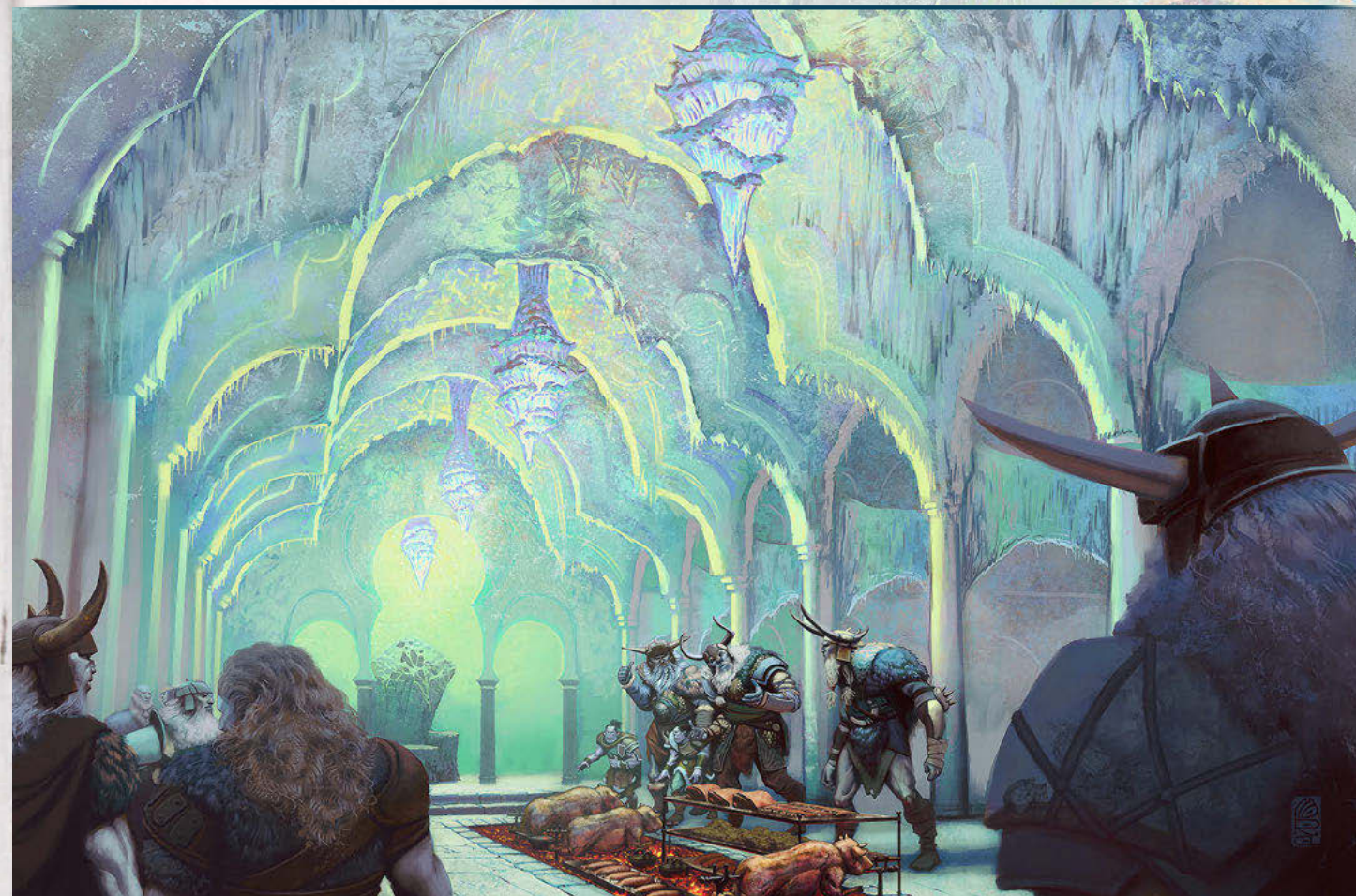
Wrestling a Giant

If the characters choose to wrestle a giant, a large ring is cleared in Uldoveld. Hundreds of giants show up to watch a brave and stupid humanoid be crushed by the giant’s champion, Ulfgar Stonehand.

To win the contest, the character’s champion must successfully grapple a frost giant for 2 rounds. The giants jokingly give the character a handicap, allowing him or her 3 rounds to escape a grapple. Anything goes in the fight, meaning that the giant might beat a restrained character mercilessly—or even to death.

The strength of even an average giant makes this an unfair contest, but the giants don’t care. Ulfgar doesn’t take the fight seriously to start with, allowing the character to pin him for 1 round and laughing before easily escaping. He will pin a character for 2 rounds, beating him or her mercilessly for the duration, only to let the character escape to try again. This game continues until Ulfgar loses the fight or kills the champion.

The most straightforward means to even the odds in this fight is to cast *enlarge/reduce* to increase the size of the party’s champion. No one else can cast magic on the character, but anything a champion can do is permissible as long as it does not involve a weapon or a wand. An eldritch knight or a robust spellcasting character could use *enlarge/reduce*, or a cleric or paladin could use *command* to order Ulfgar to grovel for successive rounds. Alternatively, a wizard watching from the side might attempt to stealthily cast a *suggestion* spell under the guise of taunting Ulfgar, causing him to “rest for a minute.” Because the giants



are implicitly cheating by offering this unbalanced challenge, the characters should have no problem with needing to cheat to win.

Spirit Mead

This challenge is for the entire party. The giants brew a thick, almost doughy beer called spirit mead. The characters must drink this exotic alcohol and expose themselves to the elements as part of a spirit journey to prove their worth. The characters will receive a collective vision if they are favored by the gods of giantkind—or they will freeze to death if they aren't.

Spirit mead is made with hexed yeast that causes hallucinations and visions. Characters who imbibe it are poisoned for 4 hours. While out in the cold, they blunder about in random directions and might be challenged by random encounters. Though they are allowed weapons for this challenge, they aren't allowed any armor or cold-weather gear. Fortunately, the spirit mead increases physical hardiness, so that the characters don't need to make Constitution saving throws against cold weather while under the effects of the mead.

This challenge focuses on storytelling, as the characters must impress the giants with the experience

of their spirit journey. Allow the players to stretch their imaginations about what the characters see in their vision, even as you prompt them with imaginative ideas of your own. Below are some examples of the sorts of things the characters might experience.

Pindalpau-pau, Mother of Reindeer. The characters move through the ice until they come across a herd of reindeer—including one twenty-foot-tall specimen that approaches the characters. The creature speaks in a soothing voice, telling the characters that she is Pindalpau-pau, mother of reindeer, and has embraced them in the herd.

The characters watch as icy, crystalline humanoids step out of the reindeer's mouth as she speaks. The figures grow and change, taking on the forms of the adventurers but carved of ice and reborn of winter. Each character develops a distinctive frost burn on his or her body that resembles an ancient Giant rune meaning "birth."

Thrym, God of Ice. As the adventurers wander across the glacier, they see Thrym, the giant god of cold and lord of the frost giants. As he leaps across the land, he brings his mighty ice axe down with a thunderous



SHOWDOWN

crack. Everywhere the blade touches, great splinters begin spreading through the glacier, erupting in deep and mighty chasms that open to a black, bottomless abyss. The giant god lands close to the characters, knocking them to the ground and rending the glacier open. A small shard of the axe splinters off to land near the adventurers as a perfect piece of clear blue ice, which the characters can bring with them as proof of their vision.

The Snow Fox. As the characters wander in the wastes, a croaking sound warns them of the approach of a dozen ice toads, carrying a litter bearing a creature whose white hair flows over the litter to the ground. When the toads set the litter down before the adventurers, they see an ancient yeti that opens the fur of its beard to reveal a sleeping fox pup. The characters then hear a voice in their heads that they know to be the fox, telling them of the ancient giant kingdom of Ostorla and of the giants' war with the dragons. It declares the characters spirit-heirs of a long-dead giant warrior named Salakko—each of their souls a fragment of his larger giant soul. It is their duty to lead the giants in the current incarnation of the ancient war. When the story is told, the fox, the yeti, and the toads turn to ice and melt away.

Steal a Remorhaz Egg

The giants covet remorhaz eggs, and they raise and train young remorhazes as mounts and guard creatures. A giant who brings an egg back from the remorhaz mating ground is considered a strong and worthy member of the tribe. See that area, above, for more details.

Returning with even one egg suffices to complete the challenge, but stealing two eggs is even more impressive. If the characters can somehow bring back one egg each, the exploit will become a legend among the giants.

Once the characters have made their alliances on the Miklos Glacier, they are able to undertake repairs to Skyreach Castle. Just as those repairs are completed, however, the Cult of the Dragon convinces the orc leader Gru-Nar to betray the giants and join the cult in taking the castle, enticed by a promise of freedom for the orcs and the ability to raid the rich lands of the south. Gru-Nar assembles his people quietly to escape the giants' notice. Then a combined force storms the castle.

Gru-Nar commands 200 orcs, which fight alongside 20 **dragonwings**, 3 **dragonsouls**, and the **adult white dragon** Glazhael. If the party earlier allied with the duplicitous Gru-Nar, the chieftain can assemble a force of only 100 orcs. In that event, however, the cult engages the giants in a temporary alliance to prevent their mutual enemy from escaping with the castle, bringing 15 **frost giants** to the fight.

These creatures work in 7 **warbands of 20 to 30 orcs** each directed or advised by 2 **dragonwings**, plus possibly 1 or 2 **frost giant**. The dragonsouls each command 3 warbands and the dragon fights on its own, supporting others.

Consult and adjust the maps of Skyreach Castle in *Hoard of the Dragon Queen* for use in this final encounter.

GRU-NAR'S ASSAULT

Though Gru-Nar is not a master tactician, the cult has provided him with information detailing the layout of the castle, inspiring him to unleash his assault in three waves.

The chieftain relies on tried and true orc tactics for the first two waves—a raiding sortie to gauge the enemy's strength, followed by a show of force to breach the castle's defenses.

The only access to the upper courtyard is by flying, coming up through the ice stairs inside the iceberg core, or climbing the walls. Because the orcs lack grappling hooks and any means of flying, they try to rush through the iceberg core for the central stairs. Though the stairs are easily defendable, the iceberg core around them is not. It has four separate entrances, including one large enough for an adult dragon, and holding those entrances will be a challenge for the adventurers. Worse, the treasure vault is located in the iceberg core. Though the adventurers might be happy to stand in the stairwell and create a dangerous bottleneck for the orcs' advance into the upper castle, doing so gives the cult an opportunity to extract the treasure if the characters have not already thought to move it to a more secure location.

The **first wave** of the attack consists of 1 probing warband, 20 orcs testing the castle's defenses and determining what traps guard the approach to the lower levels. When half the orcs are killed, the survivors flee back to the main host.

The **second wave** consists of three fresh warbands, 60 orcs, 30 of which storm the stairs while another 30 hurl caribou skulls packed with seal blubber and lit on fire over the walls. When half of those orcs are slain, the rest flee back to the host.

The **third wave** consists of the remaining orcs—approximately 160 if Gru-Nar fights at maximum strength. The cult commits its own forces and Glazrael to this final attack, with all the cultists flying over the walls in a special harness fitted on Glazrael's back. The orcs fight until the castle lifts off or the host is reduced to half its numbers. At that point, they turn on Gru-Nar and the cultists, then head back to Broken Tusk.

The adventurers can complete repairs during the attack, and the castle regains complete function during the third wave. Assuming that the party has control over the castle's spirit (see "The Fallen Castle," above), a character in the steering tower can order the castle to lift off. Doing so carries any onboard enemies into the sky along with the castle, but leaves much of the orc host on the ground below.

ALLIED FORCES

If the characters have allies fighting at their side, one giant is equal to eight orcs, one dwarf is equal to two orcs, and one yeti is worth four orcs. Rather than bringing these allied forces into the fray with endless dice rolling, assume that on each turn of combat, the above ratio of allies to orcs die or are incapacitated on both sides. These ratios can be adjusted if you wish to reward the players for sound defensive tactics.

Depending on circumstances, you should adjust the strength of the orc horde. If the assault poses no threat to the number of allies the party has gathered, more orcs can arrive from Broken Tusk in the third wave, or a single frost giant might join the fray.

Conversely, if the adventurers have committed their crew to defense but are not fighting themselves, the odds might seem impossible in the third wave. In such a scenario, a dispute about division of the treasure might break out among the orcs, who diminish their own numbers in their fury.

The Party Stands Alone

If the adventurers have not engaged any allies in this episode, they are unlikely to be able to fend off the assault of the orcs and cultists. In such a scenario, the orcs assemble their host just as the characters complete repairs, allowing the first wave to move aboard before the castle escapes. The cultists then gain access to the castle with an aerial assault on Glazrael, taking advantage of the fact that there are no defenders to scout their arrival or prevent them from making a landing.

CONCLUSION

In addition to gaining aid in the quest to claim Skyreach Castle, the adventurers can secure a longer-term alliance with one of the factions on the glacier—particularly the giants. With a giant alliance secured and the castle under the giants' control, the factions of Waterdeep can claim the floating fortress as an asset in the final episode. However, the castle remains a possession of the giants, and is not available for the party's use during the rest of the adventure.

The dwarves and the yetis are less impressive allies in the eyes of the Council of Waterdeep. Still, claiming Skyreach Castle without the aid of the giants means the adventurers can claim the flying fortress for their own use. This might greatly change the scope of the rest of the adventure, as the characters make use of their own mobile fortress and a small personal army. However, the absence of giant allies means that the death toll for the factions in the final encounter will be higher.

The characters advance one level at the end of this episode.

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