

STORM KING'S THUNDER

DOOM OF THE DESERT



DM's resources for Storm King's Thunder
Chapter 12: Doom of the Desert

Doom of the Desert

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to prepare you, the DM, for the final encounter of the Storm King's Thunder campaign: the showdown with Iymrith, the Doom of the Desert. While the campaign book's chapter 12 does give you enough information to run through the battle with Iymrith – and it is recommended you read through this chapter, before using the information on the following pages – this document seeks to elevate that encounter, so it'll be a truly memorable experience for you and your players.

First, you'll get some tips on **Companions and Items**, that'll help you supply your players with the tools they need to give them a fun and challenging encounter, without making it too easy for them. Then you'll be supplied with reflections on **Getting to the Lair** from the storm giants' Maelstrom, including an alternate mode of travel. Then we'll cover the **Approach** to the amphitheater, leading up to the **Gargoyle Fight**, which is a combat on a massive scale, where you'll be supplied with tips to make the combat (relatively) swift. This is important, because you don't want your players to be drained of their energy before they head on to the culmination of everything they've worked for: **Fighting Iymrith**. For that final showdown, we'll cover the ancient dragon's tactics, as well as supply you with alternate rules for fighting such a colossal foe.

Companions and Items

The campaign book tells you to give your party King Hekaton and four other storm giants as companions. That's honestly a lot of help for the encounter to come. It might be fine for a weaker, less-well-outfitted or smaller party, but if you have a strong party, that much help will make the impending battle far too easy. This is somewhat mitigated by one of the giants being a traitor, that

could turn on King Hekaton at an opportune moment (p. 256) – if that's an option you're using – but it's still a lot of help to give the party.

In my campaign, I had Felgolos (repurposed as a young bronze dragon, instead of an adult one) act as the party's guide. They had met him earlier in the adventure, and when King Hekaton needed to find Iymrith, he naturally asked any friendly dragon he could find. Felgolos also helped the party in the combat, along with King Hekaton and one storm giant – Emperor Uthor, in their case.

Additionally, Harshnag was still miraculously alive – having been teleported along with Iymrith, as the Eye of the All-Father collapsed – and were kept alive, to be a part of the ritual in Iymrith's lair. All in all, the party still had four helping hands – one for each of the players to control – but with far less combined power than what five storm giants bring.

Obviously, this might not fit your campaign. Maybe Harshnag is really dead, or you don't want to introduce Felgolos into the mix. If that's the case, make sure that you either don't give the party too much help, or that you thoroughly exploit Orlekto's betrayal during the fight with Iymrith, if the party seems to be doing too well.

Potions of Giant Size. The potions of giant size are a nice touch, and can certainly make the party feel a lot less overshadowed by the storm giants. I added in that they increase the user's move speed to 50 feet. For one, because I think it makes sense, but also because I think the approach towards the amphitheatre is more fun if the party can keep up with the storm giants they're travelling with (if they're making a frontal assault together).

Getting to the Lair

First order of business is how your party will get to Iymrith's lair. The campaign book suggests that the giants ride giant whales to the Whalebones, and then mount rocs to fly them from there to the Amphitheatre (p. 226). That's fine, and if you go with that solution, I suggest that you narrate it swiftly, instead of trying to make random encounters and obstacles for that journey. No sense tiring out the party before they get to the actual... party.

However, there's also a simpler way to do it. Instead of going through the trouble of describing a long journey, you can instead have King Hekaton/Serissa scry on Iymrith's lair using the Scrying Pool (area 23 of the Maelstrom, p. 212) and then the teleportation ability of the Meditation Cave (area 18 of the Maelstrom, p. 211) to *bamf* the party to Anauroch in a more expedient matter (remember to bring a *Conch of Teleportation*, so they can get back!). This mode of travel makes especially much sense if King Hekaton is leading the charge, and Iymrith successfully stole the Korolnor Scepter from Serissa, locking her to the Wyrmskull Throne. That'll put some fire under the old king's behind.

Approach

I would 'start' the approach on a turn-by-turn basis, as soon as the party is a 1000 feet away. Tell the players that they see flying creatures and two large catapults atop of the amphitheatre in the distance. The approach towards the theatre and the gargoyles can be a boring procedure if not handled correctly. There are three obvious ways they might go about it:

- **Frontal assault** - Everyone goes together in a frontal assault, dashing towards the amphitheatre each turn.
- **Stealth** - Everybody attempts to approach unseen, together.
- **Diversion** - The giants go in from one direction and draw the catapult fire, while the party sneaks in from another direction.

Frontal Assault. If the players choose the first option – the combined, frontal assault – I would have the giants suggest the party to use their *potions of giant size* immediately, so they can run as fast as the giants, or use magic (such as *dimension door*) to catch up. Otherwise, they'll likely be left out of several rounds of combat.

Stealth. If the players choose the second option, the party will probably need to aid the giants with something like *pass without trace*, *invisibility* or *wind walk*, or it's simply not feasible that the gargoyles won't see the huge giants long before they get close. While they creep in, have them make a party Stealth (Dexterity) check against a DC of 10 at 1000 feet, DC 15 at 500 feet and DC 20 at 100 feet, to determine when/if they're spotted.

Diversion. If the players choose the diversion option, where the giants charge in from the front, and the party sneaks in from behind, have the giants suggest that the party goes ahead first, or the giants will outpace them very quickly – which, again, will be boring for your players.

Combat during the Approach. Remember, the gargoyles can fire trebuchets with disadvantage from 1,000 to 500 feet away and without disadvantage from 500 feet away, if they spot the party. The storm giants have a single lightning bolt to hurl when they get within 500 feet of the gargoyles, and they can begin throwing boulders with disadvantage when they are 240 feet away, and without disadvantage when they are 60 feet away. I would also advice you to follow the advice from Sean McGovern's excellent '[A guide to Storm King's Thunder](#)' and put five gargoyles on each of the catapults, so they can load, aim and fire both of them in a single round, instead of two.

Gargoyle Fight

A fight between 30 gargoyles, a handful of party members and a couple of storm giants is a slugfest of a combat. To make it easier on yourself, I suggest you use the DMG's rules for fighting

mobs of creatures (DMG p. 250). Here's a table already calculated for you, based on the gargoyles' attack bonuses, so you don't have to:

AC	Attacks to hit
10-16	2
17-18	3
19-20	4
21-22	5
23	10
24	20

Since each gargoyle has two attacks and an attack deals an average of 5 damage, you can make some very fast calculations. For example, if five gargoyles (10 attacks) swarm a character with 17 AC, they will hit with three attacks, dealing 15 damage and so on. This will keep the gargoyles' turns very quick, so your players don't get bored.

Focus the giants. Make sure that your gargoyles focus the storm giants. Both because it's realistic – go for the big targets – and because Iymrith will be far less effective against the storm giants, than she will be against the players, since they are immune to her lightning breath. Ideally, the gargoyles can put some serious dents in the storm giants before the final encounter – perhaps even take one or two of them down.

Fighting Iymrith

This is the big one – the star of the show, the grand finale. Hopefully your players – and characters – aren't too exhausted at this point, and are ready to take on the big bad. As outlined in the campaign book, there's two ways this combat can start:

- The party provokes Iymrith to leave her lair, and the fight happens right there in the amphitheatre, until Iymrith is reduced to 240 hit points or less, and retreats back to her lair.
- The players go boldly into Iymrith's lair and are ambushed as they come into area 3 (p. 227).

Both ways have some pros and cons, depending on the party's composition. If she faces them in the amphitheatre, she can make use of her flying speed to stay out of melee combat – but the party will probably have time to set the battlefield

against her: be spread out, take cover and ready attacks and spells to hit her as she appears.

If Iymrith faces the party down below in her lair, she might get the drop on them, but she'll be without her flying speed, which is a heavy disadvantage against a melee-oriented party.

All in all, it's actually not a bad idea to have the combat divided into two parts – one above, one below, to put some tension into the encounter. Just remember, if you allow the party a long enough break to short rest in the middle of the combat, have Iymrith also regain hit points – or kill Harshnag, if she has him captured below as described earlier in this document. If the task of splitting the combat over two humongous maps is daunting – which it very well could be – or you think it will be jarring to have a small pause in the middle, stick to either one instead.

TACTICS

Iymrith has a lot of weapons at her disposal. Most prominently, she has her *Lightning Breath*, which deals terrible damage to any non-storm giant foes. She knows about the giants' immunity, of course, so she'll seek to target the players whenever it is available to her. She also has some spells, she can cast once per day: *counterspell*, which she'll use to foil the plans of any mage that gets too ambitious, *ice storm*, which she can use to shape the battlefield, and *stone shape*, which she can use to create a gargoyle, although it's hardly worth her action.

Iymrith also has lair actions, and these are great. The *cloud of sand* is her best lair action – she can use it to seriously hamper a large group of foes. Next is her *ceiling collapse* which she'll use against single foes, preferably player characters. The *lightning arc* isn't too strong, and in most cases she should probably opt to use the other two.

Lastly, Iymrith also have some potential allies: the yuan-ti cultists. These were rather nonsensical for me, as they're never fully explained or utilized in any interesting way. You can use them as they're described in the book, or

you can, if you have Harshnag captured in Iymrith's lair, have them hauling his body towards the sacrificial hole. Let's say it takes the three **yuan-ti purebloods** three rounds to pull Harshnag into the hole, unless the party stops them and frees the frost giant.

Alternatively, you can cut them from the encounter, if you find them jarring. If you do this, I recommend that you don't give the party as much help – fewer storm giants – and/or that you use the Colossus Combat rules below, that allow Iymrith to be a more dangerous and dynamic foe even if she's by herself.

COLOSSUS COMBAT

While an encounter with an ancient dragon should always be interesting, I think there are some ways to improve upon it. If Iymrith faces somewhere between 8-10 strong opponents simultaneously, she simply has no chance – lair actions or not. Her action economy is too limited. Even with a bite, two claw attacks, three legendary tail attacks and a lair action each turn, she'll be sorely outmatched in terms of meaningful damage and damage output – to the point where she'll not even take down a single frost giant before she's killed. Additionally, fifth edition combat against foes with a lot of hit points, can often feel like simply 'grinding' away hit points, because it essentially just comes down to hitting the baddie until it stops moving. To avoid this, and to make for a more tense final battle, you can use the 'Colossus Combat' rules detailed below.

Colossus Combat. In essence, the 'Colossus Combat' rules divides a singular foe into several moving parts, with separate hit point totals, ACs and initiative rolls. When characters deal damage to Iymrith, they choose which body part they hit. When Iymrith takes damage to a body part, you deduct hit points from that body part, as well as from Iymrith's hit point total – which you can put at any number you like (I recommend you put it at 600 for a party of four characters + four giants). A character can also choose to attack

Iymrith directly (against her normal AC of 22) or some attacks might only deal damage to the 'whole' of Iymrith, such as psychic damage or AoE damage. This damage is simply deducted from Iymrith's hit point total of 600, as normal.

Destroying a body part disables it permanently (or for a short while, if it's the head) and thus takes away some of Iymrith's combat output. Hopefully this makes the party consider tactics before they engage. Do they try to take away Iymrith's dangerous claw attacks and her land move speed, or do they want to ground her and take away her wing attack? Or maybe try to blind her for a short period time or cut her dangerous tail off?

Make sure you explain these rules to your players, before the combat begins, without mentioning specific numbers:

"We are using some different rules for this combat. The dragon you face has been divided into several parts: a head, a tail, four legs and two wings. Each body part has an AC 1 point higher than simply targeting the dragon's body, except the head which has an AC 2 points higher. Each body part has a hit point total between 50 and 125 hit points. If a body part's hit points reaches 0, it is disabled. A leg can no longer be used to move or attack, a wing can no longer be used to fly or make a Wing Attack, the tail can no longer be used to make a tail attack, and putting the head at 0 hit points blinds the dragon for one round. Damage dealt to the body parts also deducts hit points from the dragon's hit point total."

To help you run the battle with Iymrith using these rules, you can use the initiative sheet on the next page of this document. It has all the initiatives, hit point totals and actions of the dragon's different parts, with empty spaces where you can insert the party's information. On the sheet, lines of // divide the possible action choices, you have for each of Iymrith's body parts.

INIT	Creature	HP	AC	Notes
30	Iymrith (Body)		22	Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice within 120 feet must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or frightened for 1 minute. It can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns. If successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to Frightful Presence.
25	Head	/50	24	Lightning breath (recharge 5-6). 120-foot line, 10 feet wide. DC 23 Dex save, 88 (16d10) lightning damage on fail, half on success. // Spell (Save DC 20): 1/day each: <i>counterspell</i> , <i>detect magic</i> , <i>ice storm</i> , <i>stone shape</i> , <i>teleport</i> // Bite: +16, 15 ft., 20 (2d10+9) piercing + 11 (2d10) lightning.
20	Lair Action	-	-	Collapse. Ceiling collapses above one creature within 120 feet. DC 15 Dex save or take 10 (3d6) bludgeoning and be knocked prone, restrained, unable to breathe or stand up. Can take an action DC 10 Strength check to free itself. Cloud of Sand. 20-foot-radius sphere centered on a point within 120 feet. The cloud spreads around corners. DC 15 Con save or blinded for 1 minute. Can repeat the saving throw at end of each turn. Lightning Arcs. Lightning arcs, forming 5-foot-wide line between two of the lair's solid surfaces, within 120 feet of the dragon and 120 feet of each other. Each creature must make DC 15 Dex save or take 10 (3d6) lightning damage.
15	Leg, FR	/75	23	Move: 20 ft. // Claw: +16, 10ft., 16 (2d6+9) slashing damage
	Leg, FL	/75	23	Move: 20 ft. // Claw: +16, 10ft., 16 (2d6+9) slashing damage
	Leg, BR	/75	23	Move: 20 ft. // Claw: +16, 10ft., 16 (2d6+9) slashing damage
	Leg, BL	/75	23	Move: 20 ft. // Claw: +16, 10ft., 16 (2d6+9) slashing damage
10	Wing, L Wing, R	/125 /125	23 23	Move: 2 x fly 40 ft. // Wing Attack: Each creature within 15, DC 24 Dex save or take 16 (2d6+9) bludgeoning damage + prone. Iymrith can then fly 40 ft.
5	Tail	/125	23	Tail: +16, 20ft., 18 (2d8+9) bludgeoning damage and Medium or smaller creature must succeed on DC 24 Strength save or be hurled up to 60 feet horizontally in a direction of the dragon's choice and land prone, taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet it was thrown.
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IYMRITH HIT POINT TOTAL: