WHATEVER IT'S WORTH

by Morgan Geiss

Creature: *Erinyes* | **Level:** *12* | **CW:** *Slavery*

SYNOPSIS

The valley country of Dalemeade suffers under the Braakendrake clan of dwarves, who rule from the nearby Braakbergen mountain range. A lone exile readies herself to stand against these tyrants, but her schemes have drawn her into an infernal alliance with an army of fiends ten thousand strong. Devils do nothing for free, however, and what your party takes for a mage's treasure hunt might be prelude to a massacre.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Whatever It's Worth is intended for characters of 12th level. The party encounters a cart transporting young people marked for slavery while traveling a lonely road in the shadow of a foreboding mountain range.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Centuries ago the Braakendrake dwarf clan conquered all of the other clans of Braakbergen. The clan's victory was ensured by a secret pact between their leader, Zaran, and the hated duergar dwarves of the Underdark. The wizard Sifgir was one of a few dwarves to escape death or subjugation at the hands of the Braakendrake.

CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

- **Loosh:** A plucky, but morbid peasant.
- **Canute:** Dalemeade's titular ruler.
- **Irae:** The laconic leader of the **erinyes** army, Irae is devoted to Sifgir.
- **Sifgir:** A reserved, but generous, dwarf who remembers and avenges every wrong done to her.
- **Zaran:** Braakbergen's ruthless tyrant.
- **Orlond:** A lesser chief who opposes Zaran.
- **Ferod:** Braakbergen's craven and avaricious treasurer.
- **Olba:** The chief of a once mighty clan, Sifgir's mother leads the resistance efforts against Braakendrake.

Sifgir spent centuries searching for the means to overthrow the conquerors until she met the erinyes Irae, who convinced her that only a massive show of force could accomplish her goal. Irae offered Sifgir her army's services in exchange for souls. Sifgir accepted Irae's offer and gave the fiend her own soul in return for her personal pledge of support.

Meanwhile, the Braakendrakes subdued Dalemeade and demanded regular tribute in human slaves. Zaran now secretly trades slaves to his duergar allies in return for access to their mines. Sifgir promised Olba's resistance a mighty army without sharing its infernal nature.

CHAPTER 1 — MEETING THE DEVIL

The party encounters a cart bound for the village of Horsehead Hill in the shadow of Drakesdoom, the tremendous mountain hold of the Braakendrakes. A peasant named Loosh drives the cartful of young captives. Loosh freely explains the situation if the characters stop them. The slaves resist and protest that worse will come if the party attempts to free them.

When the party arrives in Horsehead Hill, they find a crowd of villagers ringing a dozen dwarf **veterans** guarding a group of young people outside of Sheriff Canute's hall. The crowd parts for Loosh, and the dwarves quickly pull the slaves out of the cart. Canute steps forward and addresses the crowd. Read or paraphrase the following:

> An overworked figure with a thick gray beard steps forward. Two masked dwarves wielding heavy hammers and shields loom menacingly behind him. The man raises his head to speak.
>
> *"Our sad business is done for another ten years. Again our hearts break, but our lives and our homes remain. Know that each lost child of yours weighs on my heart. Remember that the rest are safe. Remember that the lords will take tenfold of what is not freely given. Remember that I love you, though you may hate me. Endure, my people."*

Canute returns to the hall and the crowd disperses as the dwarves lead the slaves away toward the mountains.

The slavers are hostile and attack the party if they try to free the slaves, or otherwise antagonize the slavers. Canute begs the party to stand down, but does not intervene. The townspeople are grateful for the characters' heroics, but they fear reprisal. The next day, a human slave delivers a message to Canute demanding that he deliver twice the number of slaves within the week.

Dwarf NPCs

All dwarf NPCs, including Sifgir, share statistics with their counterparts in Appendix B of the *Monster Manual* except that their speed is 25 feet, and they possess the Dwarven Resilience, Dwarven Combat Training, and Dwarven Armor Training features.

The townsfolk of Dalemeade share the following information:

- The dwarves overran the valley countless generations ago and demand tribute to this day.
- Sheriff Canute conducts the valley's census every year and gives a small number of healthy young people to the dwarves as slaves.
- Dwarves took Canute's son twenty years ago. Some say the boy volunteered in order to prove there were no favorites.
- A pair of folk heroes called the Magus and the Knight is rumored to roam the valley and offer aid to the weary and oppressed. Some believe that they will one day lead Dalemeade against their oppressors.
- Any citizen or guard can take the party to see Canute about securing free food and board in his hall.

If the party visits Canute, he asks after their purpose in Dalemeade and accepts them as guests, provided they are not openly hostile towards him. Canute rewards the party for freeing the slaves with his heirloom *ring of warmth* (*DMG* p. 193).

A SHOW OF STRENGTH

A child approaches the party with a message asking for a meeting at a crossroads about a mile west of town. The child believes that the very tall hooded woman who gave him the message is the Knight.

Irae waits for the party at the crossroads. She is transformed into a human **warlord** by means of *true polymorph*. She seeks powerful warriors on behalf of a client offering 1,000 gp for help retrieving a lost book of magic. If the party is interested, Irae tests them by releasing a **nalfeshnee** from an *iron flask*.

Irae asks the party to meet with her client after they pass her test. She leads them into a stand of trees and opens the door to Sifgir's magnificent mansion.

> The stranger opens an unseen door into a grand hall of soaring columns and blazing torches. Long tables piled high with food run the length of the hall. An ephemeral statue bows to you just inside the doorway.
>
> A tired dwarf with shocks of iron gray streaking her dark brown hair and beard approaches you down a lane framed by two tables. The fine make of her robes is faded and frayed.

Sifgir invites the party to make themselves comfortable and introduces herself. She offers them time to rest and recuperate before talking business. The mansion's servants appear in the form of dwarf-sized **stone golems**.

DEVELOPMENT

Before or after discussing business with Sifgir, the party may eat as they please, avail themselves of the servants' services, and take a short or long rest in comfortable conditions. Proceed to *Chapter 2*.

CHAPTER 2 – READ BEFORE SIGNING

Irae sends a servant to retrieve Sifgir as soon as the party is ready. Sifgir summarizes the Braakendrakes' conquest and explains that the book she is after is kept in a demiplane created by a long-lost wizard. She feigns ignorance of what the party can expect to face within.

Characters can reach the demiplane through a three-inch wooden cube that Sifgir keeps on her person. Only humanoid creatures with souls may enter or exit the demiplane and may only do so by speaking the command words, but to learn the command words the characters must sign a contract specifying terms of payment. The contract also demands that the party pay a fine equal to the value of the intact book should they damage or attempt to read it. Objects native to the demiplane reform within seconds of being damaged.

BIGGER ON THE INSIDE

The first time a character enters the demiplane, read or paraphrase the following:

> Your feet strike stone with a jolt. Ancient, crumbling walls enclose you in a humid chamber that reeks of decay. A stone basin crafted in the shape of a gaping mouth and filled with foul, murky liquid sits on a squat pedestal in the center of the space. A soft clinking sound draws your gaze up to the dozens of rotting bodies dangling out of the darkness from chains.

The demiplane is dimly lit from an indistinguishable source. The room is thirty square feet with an infinitely tall walls. Draconic runes carved into the lip of the basin read, "Life is my meat, Death my wine. Love is my fruit, Hate my sweet."

An object corresponding to each requirement must be placed inside the basin. The first time any requirement is satisfied, the liquid changes color as follows:

- **Satisfying Life** changes the color of the liquid to red.
- **Satisfying Death** changes the color of the liquid to black.
- **Satisfying Love** changes the color of the liquid to gold.
- **Satisfying Hate** changes the color of the liquid to silver. Hate: silver.

Anything placed in the basin disappears forever. The liquid drains into the basin when all of the requirements are satisfied, after which the party is transported to a room that is 60 feet square with walls that are 30 feet tall. They appear in front of an enormous door in the center of awall. A robed **nothic** wearing *winged boots* cowers upon a throne in the middle of the room, facing the door. The demiplane's command words do not work in this room.

Read or paraphrase the following:

> The hideous, one-eyed wretch points a gnarled claw at you and shrieks a warbling, piercing, wail makes your brain spasm. With a brilliant blast of green light, the wall behind the throne explodes into a cloud of dust.

A **beholder** emerges at the opposite end of the room from the party. The disintegrated wall reforms behind it and combat begins. The room behaves as the beholder's lair.

The nothic spends its turn trying to evade the party while using its action to shriek at the nearest hostile creature that it can see. This creature becomes the beholder's target until the start of the nothic's next turn. The beholder acts on its own accord if the nothic fails to designate a target for any reason.

Characters can uncover the door's key on a chain around the nothic's neck with a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check after the battle. A similar check reveals a *luckstone* (*DMG* p. 205) in the beholder's stomach.

Placing the key in the door returns the party to the entrance where the basin has now been replaced by a dais, upon which sits the book they have been sent to collect. The book is latched shut, but not locked, and the first creature to touch it activates a *glyph of warding* storing a *disintegrate* spell cast on the front of the dais. A successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check on the book reveals the glyph before it is activated.

The Book of Stolen Lives

Each page of the book contains a soul represented by an image of its owner and a summary of their life. Tearing out a page frees that soul, but does not return the person to life. Sifgir intends to commission Irae's army by giving the fiend this book. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (History) check allows a non-magical appraisal of the book, deeming it an art object worth 1,000 gp.

Development

Sifgir pays the party on delivery of the book and invites them to rest in her mansion for one more night. In accordance with the contract, Irae owns the souls of any characters who damaged the book or glimpsed its contents. Proceed to *Chapter 3*.

Chapter 3 — Paying the Bill

Sifgir dispels Irae's *polymorph* spell with a scroll of *dispel magic* after leaving the mansion. She opens a portal to Hell using a scroll of gate, through which the erinyes army emerges. Read or paraphrase the following:

> You hear a low pulsing and rustling that rises to the roar of crashing thunder. A dark whirlwind of shadows climbs in a column up to the sky. At its peak near the clouds, the cyclone spreads and now you behold uncountable knights in dark armor, bearing enormous batlike wings.

All erinyes, including Irae, possess *ropes of entanglement* and the *summon devil* ability. Sifgir explains her idea to intimidate the chiefs into negotiations before being carried off to Drakesdoom by erinyes.

The hold's citadel is warded against Irae's army and she offers the party another 2,000 gp and any of the characters' souls in her possession if they agree to guard Sifgir. If the characters decline Irae's offer, she is joined by two erinyes per player character and they attack the party until all of the characters surrender or fall unconscious. Any erinyes who fall are replaced by two more at the start of the next round. The erinyes stabilize any unconscious characters and carry those who cannot fly to Drakesdoom.

Reckoning

The erinyes batter down the gates of Drakesdoom and flood the hold. Irae and the party catch up with Sifgir just outside the citadel, which is impenetrable to fiends and undead.

Zaran waits with the other chiefs in his office within the citadel. Three **stone golems** stand guard outside of the office door. These guardians do not attack except to defend themselves. Most of the Braakendrake armies are gathering in the citadel in preparation for a counterattack. Meanwhile, Olba's resistance occupies the hold under the erinyes' protection.

Zaran refuses to allow the party entrance, enforcing his will with the golems if need be. Sifgir asks that the party stand ready in the citadel common during talks. Soon after, the petty chief Orlond emerges. After explaining that they expelled him for accusing Zaran

of corruption, Orlond asks the party to accompany him to his office. He admits to believing that Zaran is bribing the treasurer, Ferod. He offers the party his *+2 battleaxe* to find out why.

Orlond directs the party to Ferod's office where the treasurer keeps a coded ledger documenting Zaran's illicit business in a safe beneath his desk. Finding the safe requires a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check and a successful DC 14 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check to unlock it.

Unless Orlond is given the ledger to decipher, Zaran calls Sifgir's bluff after two hours of deliberating with the chiefs. In either case, he and Sifgir emerge into the citadel common with the chiefs. Zaran (**dwarf warlord**) denounces Sifgir and the party, and he and the stone golems attack.

The common is a 100 foot diameter hexagon with a 50 foot high ceiling. Sifgir has the statistics of an **archmage** with the dwarf NPC traits mentioned in *Chapter 1*, except that she has the *shield* spell in place of *mage armor* and the *true polymorph* spell in place of time stop. She wears half plate +1 and wields a *staff of power* (*DMG*).

DEVELOPMENT

Olba arrives after the battle with her cohort. The resistance has complete control of the hold outside the citadel. Proceed to *Conclusion A* if the party exposed Zaran or *Conclusion B* if they did not.

CONCLUSION A

The chiefs arrest Zaran and submit to Olba. Read or paraphrase the following:

> Olba calls an assembly of the clans to the citadel, addressing them regally.
>
> *"We come through darkness to find the hearth again. Let those who repent their crimes be humbled and restored through work and trust."*
>
> The proud queen turns her steely gaze toward you, her eyes settling on her daughter. *"You have our love and gratitude for your part in breaking our chains, but the abominations you unleashed is unforgivable. Rid us of these devils in penance, then take your folk and go, and never return.*
>
> *"Folk of the hold, celebrate and rejoice, and let your hearts rest warm beside the hearth."*

After Olba emancipates the human slaves, the dwarves politely encourage the party to take them and leave immediately.

CONCLUSION B

After three days of fighting against the erinyes, Zaran's loyal chiefs and their armies are crushed, leaving Olba in control. Read or paraphrase the following:

> The weary queen gathers her surviving people to the citadel and addresses them.
>
> *"We come through darkness and find a hearth of cold ash. The Braakbergen is a cursed tomb, and its denizens corrupt slaves. I will abide it no more, but seek out a new hearth in some other depth."*
>
> Olba passes her ferocious gaze over you and her daughter. *"Your lives are spared for your part in breaking our chains, but condemnation upon you for the abomination you unleashed. Go, and be damned with your devils.*
>
> *"You who still love me, join me. The rest can perish for all I care."*

Olba departs with most of the clan's remnants, abandoning the human slaves. The remaining dwarves are hostile and insist the party leave immediately.

EPILOGUE

Sifgir reopens the portal to Hell with another scroll of gate and as the army of erinyes departs, she thanks the party for their help. As a reward for exposing Zaran, Sifgir gives the party 5,000 gp and her staff of power. Sifgir and Irae embrace fondly before entering the portal together, hand in hand, as it closes behind them.

If the party returns the prisoners to Dalemeade, Canute holds a public feast in their honor.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards:

XP REWARDS

Add the total XP of challenges overcome by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

Challenge	XP
Beholder	10,000
Erinyes	8,400
Nothic	450
Priest	475
Stone Golem	5,900
Veteran	700
Warlord	8,400
Solve basin puzzle	10,000
Expose Zaran	20,000

TREASURE REWARDS

Beholder:	*luckstone*
Canute:	*ring of warmth*
Nothic:	*winged boots*
Orlond:	*axe +2*
Sifgir:	6,000 gp, *staff of power*

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The erinyes in this adventure were inspired by their counterparts in The Eumenides, an ancient Greek play with an infuriating ending for anyone who likes to think of women as people. This module is my attempt to take the coolest part of that story, an army of righteous demon-god-women, and let them be as awesome as that sounds.

It wasn't easy. *D&D* lore makes erinyes pure evil, and myth casts them as bloodthirsty gods of vengeance. In either case we're left with ostensibly powerful women who are in fact just types and functions. To escape that, the erinyes had to have freedom of will and agency, while remaining recognizable for what they are. "Goth mercs doing something noble but mainly for the cash" is where they ended up in this story. I'll take it.

Thanks first to Ashley Warren for accepting me into this project alongside so many talented writers, artists, and gamers. Thanks to my parents for supporting my coming out as a huge damn nerd (I know you always knew). Thanks to my brother who helped us fight dragons until he had to go save the world. To you, you know who you are: thank you for driving across town for playtests, feeding us tons of lumpia, and that face you made when the army of devils showed up. And to my wife, our DM: thank you for your incalculable help in figuring out what worked and what sucked, even if what worked for you sometimes was near-TPK. You tell such wonderful stories. Thank you for letting me play such a big part in yours.

To the players and DM: Thank you for reading and playing this adventure. I hope you had fun. That's really all I want in the end. You're the best.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Morgan's preferred pronouns are she/her. She lives in Texas with her wife and cat.