

Beowulf

Translation from Burton Raffel

Prologue

Hear me! We've heard of Danish heroes,
Ancient kings and the glory they cut
For themselves, swinging mighty swords!
How Shild¹ made slaves of soldiers from every
Land, crowds of captives he'd beaten 5
Into terror; he'd traveled to Denmark alone,
An abandoned child, but changed his own fate,
Lived to be rich and much honored. He ruled
Lands on all sides: wherever the sea
Would take them his soldiers sailed, returned 10
With tribute and obedience. There was a brave
King! And he gave them more than his glory,
Conceived a son for the Danes, a new leader
Allowed them by the grace of God. They had lived,
Before his coming, kingless and miserable; 15
Now the Lord of all life, Ruler
Of glory, blessed them with a prince, Beo,²
Whose power and fame soon spread through the world.
Shild's strong son was the glory of Denmark;
His father's warriors were wound round his heart 20
With golden rings, bound to their prince
By his father's treasure. So young men build
The future, wisely open-handed in peace,
Protected in war; so warriors earn
Their fame, and wealth is shaped with a sword. 25
When his time was come the old king died,
Still strong but called to the Lord's hands.
His comrades carried him down to the shore,
Bore him as their leader had asked, their lord
And companion, while words could move on his tongue. 30
Shild's reign had been long; he'd ruled them well.
There in the harbor was a ring-prowed fighting
Ship, its timbers icy, waiting,
And there they brought the beloved body
Of their ring-giving lord, and laid him near 35
The mast. Next to that noble corpse

¹ Shild, a Danish king. He arrived in Denmark alone in a ship when he was a child. The ship was loaded with many treasures.

² Beo, grandfather of Hrothgar, a Danish king.

They heaped up treasures, jeweled helmets,
 Hooked swords and coats of mail, armor
 Carried from the ends of the earth: no ship
 Had ever sailed so brightly fitted, 40
 No king sent forth more- deeply mourned.
 Forced to set him adrift, floating
 As far as the tide might run, they refused
 To give him less from their hoards of gold
 Than those who'd shipped him away, an orphan 45
 And a beggar, to cross the waves alone.
 High up over his head they flew
 His shining banner, then sadly let
 The water pull at the ship, watched it
 Slowly sliding to where neither rulers 50
 Nor heroes nor anyone can say whose hands
 Opened to take that motionless cargo

Chapter 1: Grendel Attacks the Danes

Then Beo was king in that Danish castle,
 Schild's son ruling as long as his father
 And as loved, a famous lord of men. 55
 And he in turn gave his people a son,
 The great Healfdane, a fierce fighter
 Who led the Danes to the end of his long
 Life and left them four children,
 Three princes to guide them in battle, Hergar 60
 And Hrothgar and Halga the Good, and one daughter,
 Yrs, who was given to Onela, king
 Of the Swedes, and became his wife and their queen.

Then Hrothgar, taking the throne, led
 The Danes to such glory that comrades and kinsmen 65
 Swore by his sword, and young men swelled
 His armies, and he thought of greatness and resolved
 To build a hall³ that would hold his mighty
 Band and reach higher toward Heaven than anything
 That had ever been known to the sons of men. 70
 And in that hall he'd divide the spoils
 Of their victories, to old and young what they'd earned
 In battle, but leaving the common pastures
 Untouched, and taking no lives. The work
 Was ordered, the timbers tied and shaped 75
 By the hosts that Hrothgar ruled. It was quickly
 Ready, that most beautiful of dwellings, built
 As he'd wanted, and then he whose word was obeyed
 All over the earth named it Herot.
 His boast come true he commanded a banquet, 80
 Opened out his treasure-full hands.
 That towering place, gabled and huge,
 Stood waiting for time to pass, for war
 To begin, for flames to leap as high
 As the feud that would light them, and for Herot to burn, 85



³ 68 hall: the Danish King Hrothgar's mead hall, Herot.

A powerful monster, living down
 In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient
 As day after day the music rang
 Loud in that hall, the harp's rejoicing
 Call and the poet's clear songs, sung 90
 Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling
 The Almighty making the earth, shaping
 These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,
 Then proudly setting the sun and moon
 To glow across the land and light it; 95
 The corners of the earth were made lovely with trees
 And leaves, made quick with life, with each
 Of the nations who now move on its face. And then
 As now warriors sang of their pleasure:
 So Hrothgar's men lived happy in his hall 100
 Till the monster stirred, that demon, that fiend,
 Grendel, who haunted the moors, the wild
 Marshes, and made his home in a hell
 Not hell but earth. He was spawned⁴ in that slime,
 Conceived by a pair of those monsters born 105
 Of Cain,⁵ murderous creatures banished
 By God, punished forever for the crime
 Of Abel's death. The Almighty drove
 Those demons out, and their exile was bitter,
 Shut away from men; they split 110
 Into a thousand forms of evil—spirits
 And fiends, goblins, monsters, giants,
 A brood forever opposing the Lord's
 Will, and again and again defeated.

Chapter 2

Then, when darkness had dropped, Grendel 115
 Went up to Herot, wondering what the warriors
 Would do in that hall when their drinking was done.
 He found them sprawled in sleep, suspecting
 Nothing, their dreams undisturbed. The monster's
 Thoughts were as quick as his greed or his claws: 120
 He slipped through the door and there in the silence
 Snatched up thirty men, smashed them
 Unknowing in their beds, and ran out with their bodies,
 The blood dripping behind him, back
 To his lair,⁶ delighted with his night's slaughter. 125
 At daybreak, with the sun's first light, they saw
 How well he had worked, and in that gray morning
 Broke their long feast with tears and laments⁷
 For the dead. Hrothgar, their lord, sat joyless
 In Herot, a mighty prince mourning 130
 The fate of his lost friends and companions,
 Knowing by its tracks that some demon had torn
 His followers apart. He wept, fearing

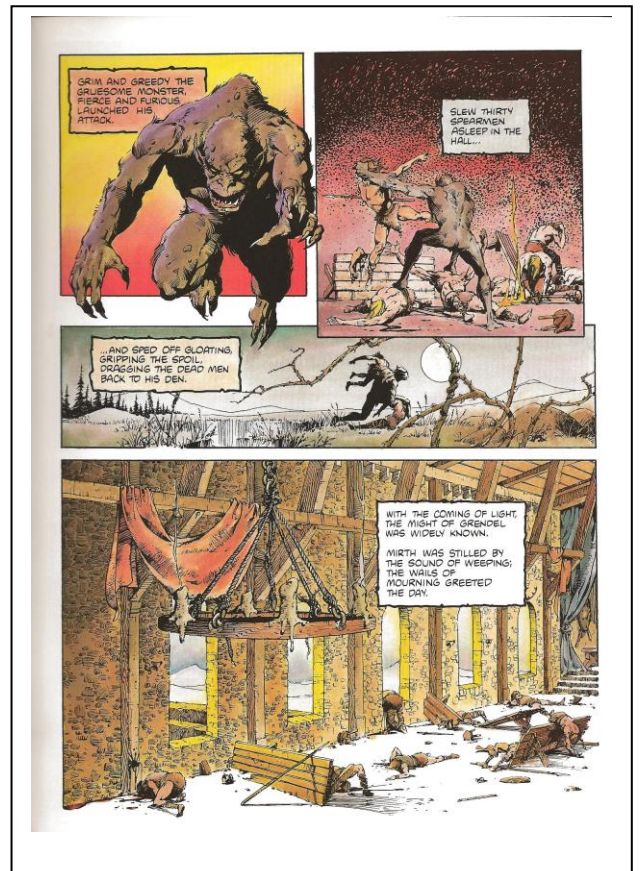
⁴ 104 spawned: born. Usually, *spawned* refers to the production of young by fish, amphibians, or other water-dwelling creatures.

⁵ 106 Cain: According to the Bible (Genesis 4:8), *Cain*, the eldest son of Adam and Eve, murdered his brother Abel.

⁶ 125 lair: den of a wild animal.

⁷ 128 lament: (*n.*) expression of sorrow; song or literary composition that mourns a loss or death.

The beginning might not be the end. And that night
 Grendel came again, so set 135
 On murder that no crime could ever be enough,
 No savage assault quench his lust
 For evil. Then each warrior tried
 To escape him, searched for rest in different
 Beds, as far from Herot as they could find, 140
 Seeing how Grendel hunted when they slept.
 Distance was safety; the only survivors
 Were those who fled him. Hate had triumphed.
 So Grendel ruled, fought with the righteous,
 One against many, and won; so Herot 145
 Stood empty, and stayed deserted for years,
 Twelve winters of grief for Hrothgar, king
 Of the Danes, sorrow heaped at his door
 By hell-forged⁸ hands. His misery leaped
 The seas, was told and sung in all 150
 Men's ears: how Grendel's hatred began,
 How the monster relished his savage war
 On the Danes, keeping the bloody feud
 Alive, seeking no peace, offering
 No truce, accepting no settlement, no price 155
 In gold or land, and paying the living
 For one crime only with another. No one
 Waited for reparation from his plundering claws:
 That shadow of death hunted in the darkness,
 Stalked Hrothgar's warriors, old 160
 And young, lying in waiting, hidden
 In mist, invisibly following them from the edge
 Of the marsh, always there, unseen.
 So mankind's enemy continued his crimes,
 Killing as often as he could, coming 165
 Alone, bloodthirsty and horrible. Though he lived
 In Herot, when the night hid him, he never
 Dared to touch king Hrothgar's glorious
 Throne, protected by God—God,
 Whose love Grendel could not know. But Hrothgar's 170
 Heart was bent. The best and most noble
 Of his council debated remedies, sat
 In secret sessions, talking of terror
 And wondering what the bravest of warriors could do.
 And sometimes they sacrificed to the old stone gods, 175
 Made heathen vows, hoping for Hell's
 Support, the Devil's guidance in driving
 Their affliction off. That was their way,
 And the heathen's only hope, Hell
 Always in their hearts, knowing neither God 180
 Nor His passing as He walks through our world, the Lord
 Of Heaven and earth; their ears could not hear
 His praise nor know His glory. Let them
 Beware, those who are thrust into danger,
 Clutched at by trouble, yet can carry no solace 185
 In their hearts, cannot hope to be better! Hail



⁸ 149 forged: (adj.) formed or shaped, often with blows or pressure after heating

To those who will rise to God, drop off
Their dead bodies, and seek our Father's peace!

Chapter 3: The Coming of Beowulf

So the living sorrow of Healfdane's son⁹
Simmered, bitter and fresh, and no wisdom 190
Or strength could break it: That agony hung
On king and people alike, harsh
And unending, violent and cruel, and evil.

In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac's
Follower¹⁰ and the strongest of the Geats—greater 195
And stronger than anyone anywhere in this world—
Heard how Grendel filled nights with horror
And quickly commanded a boat fitted out,
Proclaiming that he'd go to that famous king,
Would sail across the sea to Hrothgar, 200
Now when help was needed. None
Of the wise ones regretted his going, much
As he was loved by the Geats: The omens were good,
And they urged the adventure on. So Beowulf
Chose the mightiest men he could find, 205
The bravest and best of the Geats, fourteen
In all, and led them down to their boat;
He knew the sea, would point the prow¹¹
Straight to that distant Danish shore.

Then they sailed, set their ship 210
Out on the waves, under the cliffs.
Ready for what came they wound through the currents,
The seas beating at the sand, and were borne
In the lap of their shining ship, lined
With gleaming armor, going safely 215
In that oak-hard boat to where their hearts took them.
The wind hurried them over the waves,
The ship foamed through the sea like a bird
Until, in the time they had known it would take,
Standing in the round-curved prow they could see 220
Sparkling hills, high and green
Jutting up over the shore, and rejoicing
In those rock-steep cliffs they quietly ended
Their voyage. Jumping to the ground, the Geats
Pushed their boat to the sand and tied it 225
In place, mail shirts¹² and armor rattling
As they swiftly moored their ship. And then
They gave thanks to God for their easy crossing.

High on a wall a Danish watcher
Patrolling along the cliffs saw 230
The travelers crossing to the shore, their shields
Raised and shining; he came riding down,
Hrothgar's lieutenant, spurring his horse,
Needing to know why they'd landed, these men



⁹ 189 Healfdane's son: Hrothgar.

¹⁰ 195-196 Higlac's Follower: Higlac, king of the Geats, is Beowulf's uncle. Higlac's follower, then, refers to Beowulf.

¹¹ 208 prow: the bow, or forwardmost part of the ship.

¹² 226 mail shirts: a type of flexible body armor usually made of linked metal loops.

In armor. Shaking his heavy spear
 In their faces he spoke:
 "Whose soldiers are you,
 You who've been carried in your deep-keeled ship¹³
 Across the sea-road to this country of mine?
 Listen! I've stood on these cliffs longer
 Than you know, keeping our coast free
 Of pirates, raiders sneaking ashore
 From their ships, seeking our lives and our gold.
 None have ever come more openly—
 And yet you've offered no password, no sign
 From my prince, no permission from my people for your
 landing
 Here. Nor have I ever seen,
 Out of all the men on earth, one greater
 Than has come with you; no commoner carries
 Such weapons, unless his appearance, and his beauty
 Are both lies. You! Tell me your name,
 And your father's; no spies go further onto Danish
 Soil than you've come already. Strangers,
 From wherever it was you sailed, tell it,
 And tell it quickly, the quicker the better,
 I say, for us all. Speak, say
 Exactly who you are, and from where, and why."

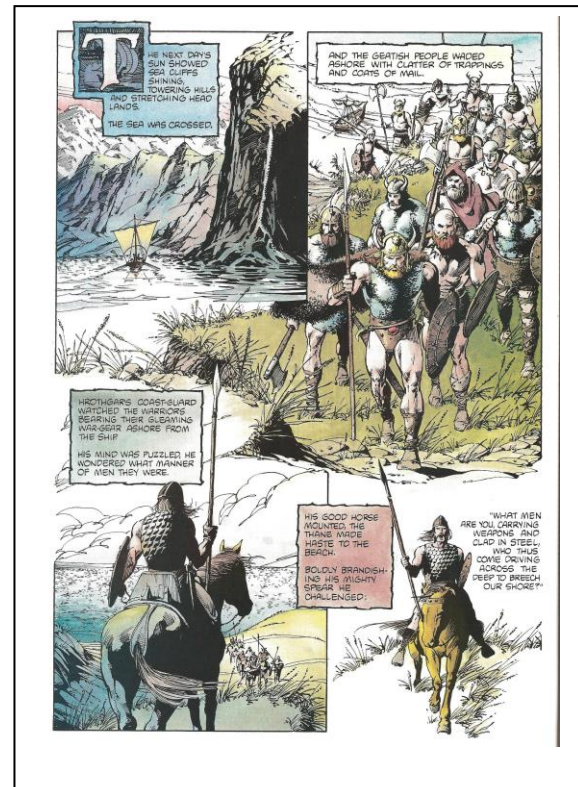
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Chapter 4

Their leader answered him, Beowulf unlocking
 Words from deep in his breast:

"We are Geats,
 Men who follow Higlac. My father
 Was a famous soldier, known far and wide
 As a leader of men. His name was Edgetho.
 His life lasted many winters;
 Wise men all over the earth surely
 Remember him still. And we have come seeking
 Your prince, Healfdane's son, protector
 Of this people, only in friendship: instruct us,
 Watchman, help us with your words! Our errand
 Is a great one, our business with the glorious king
 Of the Danes no secret; there's nothing dark
 Or hidden in our coming. You know (if we've heard
 The truth, and been told honestly) that your country
 Is cursed with some strange, vicious creature
 That hunts only at night and that no one
 Has seen. It's said, watchman, that he has slaughtered
 Your people, brought terror to the darkness. Perhaps
 Hrothgar can hunt, here in my heart,
 For some way to drive this devil out—
 If anything will ever end the evils
 Afflicting your wise and famous lord.
 Here he can cool his burning sorrow.
 Or else he may see his suffering go on

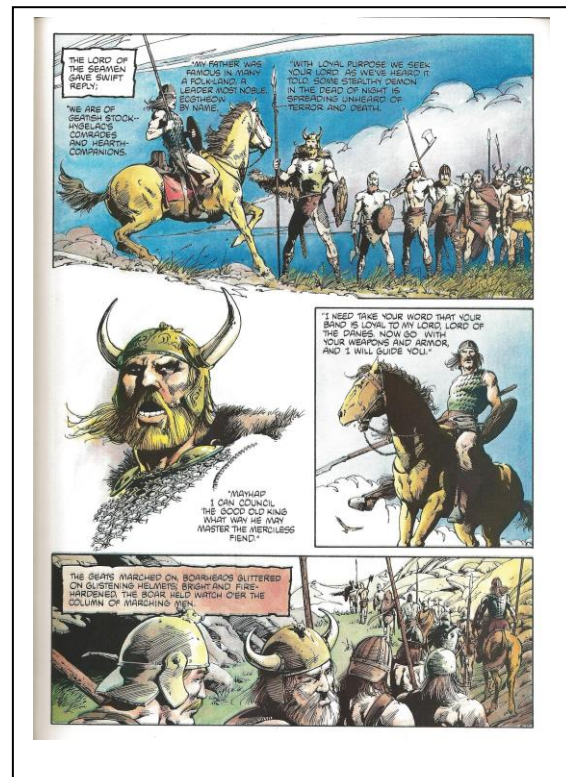
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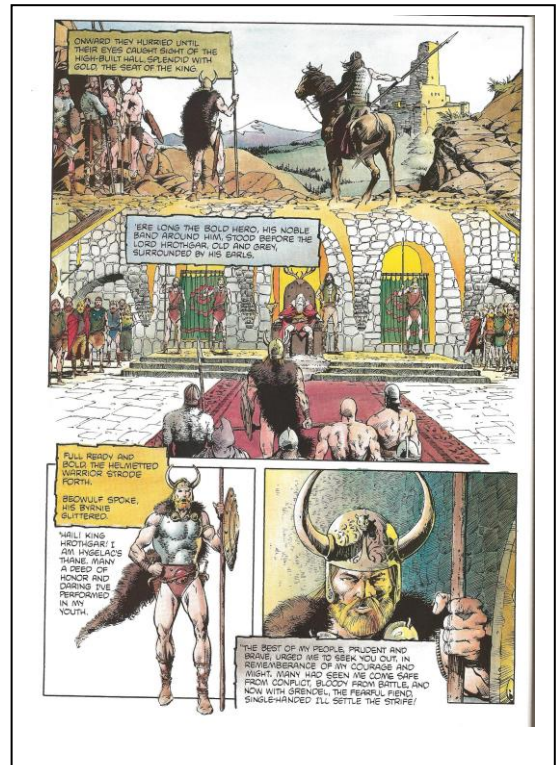


¹³ 238 deep-keeled ship: a ship that possesses a deep bottom-the *keel* being the main piece of timber that runs the length of the bottom of a boat to support the ship's home.

Forever, for as long as Herot towers
High on your hills.” 285

The mounted officer
Answered him bluntly, the brave watchman:
“A soldier should know the difference between words
And deeds, and keep that knowledge clear
In his brain. I believe your words, I trust in 290
Your friendship. Go forward, weapons and armor
And all, on into Denmark. I’ll guide you
Myself—and my men will guard your ship,
Keep it safe here on our shores,
Your fresh-tarred boat, watch it well, 295
Until that curving prow carries
Across the sea to Geatland a chosen
Warrior who bravely does battle with the creature
Haunting our people, who survives that horror
Unhurt, and goes home bearing our love.” 300

Then they moved on. Their boat lay moored,
Tied tight to its anchor. Glittering at the top
Of their golden helmets wild boar heads gleamed,
Shining decorations, swinging as they marched,
Erect like guards, like sentinels, as though ready 305
To fight. They marched, Beowulf and his men
And their guide, until they could see the gables
Of Herot, covered with hammered gold
And glowing in the sun—that most famous of all dwellings,
Towering majestic, its glittering roofs 310
Visible far across the land.
Their guide reined in his horse, pointing
To that hall, built by Hrothgar for the best
And bravest of his men; the path was plain,
They could see their way. 315



Chapter 6: The Arrival of a Hero

Then Wulfgar¹⁴ went to the door and addressed
The waiting seafarers with soldier’s words: 390
“My lord, the great king of the Danes, commands me
To tell you that he knows of your noble birth
And that having come to him from over the open
Sea you have come bravely and are welcome.
Now go to him as you are, in your armor and helmets, 395
But leave your battle-shields here, and your spears,
Let them lie waiting for the promises your words
May make.”
Beowulf arose, with his men
Around him, ordering a few to remain 400
With their weapons, leading the others quickly
Along under Herot’s steep roof into Hrothgar’s
Presence. Standing on that prince’s own hearth,
Helmeted, the silvery metal of his mail shirt
Gleaming with a smith’s high art, he greeted 405

¹⁴ 389 Wulfgar: the Watchman who guided Beowulf and his men from the coast to the mead-hall, Herot.

The Danes' great lord:

"Hail, Hrothgar!

Higlac is my cousin¹⁵ and my king; the days
Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's
Name has echoed in our land: Sailors 410
Have brought us stories of Herot, the best
Of all mead-halls, deserted and useless when the moon
Hangs in skies the sun had lit,
Light and life fleeing together.
My people have said, the wisest, most knowing 415
And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes'
Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,
Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,
Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove
Five great giants into chains, chased 420
All of that race from the earth. I swam
In the blackness of night, hunting monsters
Out of the ocean, and killing them one
By one; death was my errand and the fate
They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called 425
Together, and I've come. Grant me, then,
Lord and protector of this noble place,
A single request! I have come so far,
Oh shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend,
That this one favor you should not refuse me— 430
That I, alone and with the help of my men,
May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard,
Too, that the monster's scorn of men
Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.
Nor will I. My lord Higlac 435
Might think less of me if I let my sword
Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid
Behind some broad linden shield:¹⁶ My hands
Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life
Against the monster. God must decide 440
Who will be given to death's cold grip.
Grendel's plan, I think, will be
What it has been before, to invade this hall
And gorge his belly with our bodies. If he can,
If he can. And I think, if my time will have come, 445
There'll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare
For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody
Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones,
And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls
Of his den. No, I expect no Danes 450
Will fret about sewing our shrouds,¹⁷ if he wins.
And if death does take me, send the hammered
Mail of my armor to Higlac, return
The inheritance I had from Hrethel,¹⁸ and he
From Wayland.¹⁹ Fate will unwind as it must!" 455



¹⁵ 408 **cousin**: meaning "relative." Higlac is Beowulf's uncle and feudal lord.

¹⁶ 438 **linden shield**: shield made of wood of the linden tree.

¹⁷ 451 **shrouds**: cloths used to wrap a body for burial.

¹⁸ 454 **Hrethel**: Beowulf's grandfather, former king of the Geats.

¹⁹ 455 **Wayland**: a smith celebrated for his wonderful workmanship in making swords and shirts of ringed metal (mail shirts).

Chapter 7

Hrothgar replied, protector of the Danes:
“Beowulf, you’ve come to us in friendship, and
because
Of the reception your father found at our court.
Edgetho had begun a bitter feud,
Killing Hathlaf, a Wulfing warrior:²⁰ 460
Your father’s countrymen were afraid of war,
If he returned to his home, and they turned him away.
Then he traveled across the curving waves
To the land of the Danes. I was new to the throne,
Then, a young man ruling this wide 465
Kingdom and its golden city: Hergar,
My older brother, a far better man
Than I, had died and dying made me,
Second among Healfdane’s sons, first
In this nation. I bought the end of Edgetho’s 470
Quarrel, sent ancient treasures through the ocean’s
Furrows to the Wulfings; your father swore
He’d keep that peace. My tongue grows heavy,
And my heart, when I try to tell you what Grendel
Has brought us, the damage he’s done, here 475
In this hall. You see for yourself how much smaller
Our ranks have become, and can guess what we’ve lost
To his terror. Surely the Lord Almighty
Could stop his madness, smother his lust!
How many times have my men, glowing 480
With courage drawn from too many cups
Of ale, sworn to stay after dark
And stem that horror with a sweep of their swords.
And then, in the morning, this mead-hall glittering
With new light would be drenched with blood, the
benches 485
Stained red, the floors, all wet from that fiend’s
Savage assault—and my soldiers would be fewer
Still, death taking more and more.
But to table, Beowulf, a banquet in your honor:
Let us toast your victories, and talk of the future.” 490
Then Hrothgar’s men gave places to the Geats,
Yielded benches to the brave visitors,
And led them to the feast. The keeper of the mead
Came carrying out the carved flasks,
And poured that bright sweetness. A poet 495
Sang, from time to time, in a clear
Pure voice. Danes and visiting Geats
Celebrated as one, drank and rejoiced.

²⁰ 460 **Wulfing warrior:** the Wulfings were a Germanic tribe. Hrothgar’s queen might have been a Wulfing.

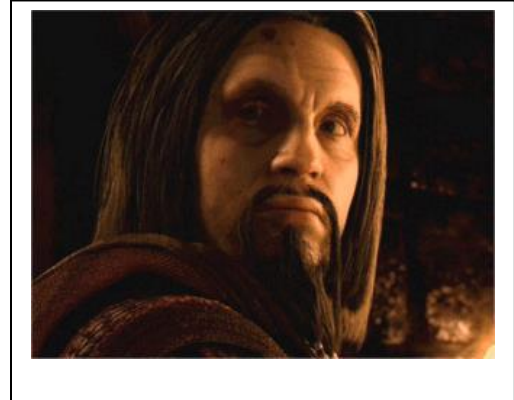
Chapter 8: Unferth's Challenge

Unferth²¹ spoke, Ecglaf's son,
Who sat at Hrothgar's feet, spoke harshly 500
And sharp (vexed by Beowulf's adventure,
By their visitor's courage, and angry that anyone
In Denmark or anywhere on earth had ever
Acquired glory and fame greater
Than his own): 505

 "You're Beowulf, are you—the same
Boastful fool who fought a swimming
Match with Brecca, both of you daring
And young and proud, exploring the deepest 510
Seas, risking your lives for no reason
But the danger? All older and wiser heads warned you
Not to, but no one could check such pride.
With Brecca at your side you swam along
The sea-paths, your swift-moving hands pulling you
Over the ocean's face. Then winter 515
Churned through the water, the waves ran you
As they willed, and you struggled seven long nights
To survive. And at the end victory was his,
Not yours. The sea carried him close
To his home, to southern Norway, near 520
The land of the Brondings, where he ruled and was
loved,
Where his treasure was piled and his strength
protected
His towns and his people. He'd promised to outswim
you:

Bonstan's son²² made that boast ring true.
You've been lucky in your battles, Beowulf, but I think 525
Your luck may change if you challenge Grendel,
Staying a whole night through in this hall,
Waiting where that fiercest of demons can find you."

 Beowulf answered, Edgeth's great son:
 "Ah! Unferth, my friend, your face 530
Is hot with ale, and your tongue has tried
To tell us about Brecca's doings. But the truth
Is simple: No man swims in the sea
As I can, no strength is a match for mine.
As boys, Brecca and I had boasted— 535
We were both too young to know better—that we'd risk
Our lives far out at sea, and so
We did. Each of us carried a naked
Sword, prepared for whales or the swift
Sharp teeth and beaks of needlefish. 540
He could never leave me behind, swim faster
Across the waves than I could, and I
Had chosen to remain close to his side.



²¹ 499 **Unferth**: A Danish warrior who is jealous of Beowulf and is unwilling or unable to fight Grendel himself, thus proving himself inferior to Beowulf

²² 524 **Bonstan's son**: Brecca's father was Bonstan.

I remained near him for five long nights,
Until a flood swept us apart;
The frozen sea surged around me,
It grew dark, the wind turned bitter, blowing
From the north, and the waves were savage. Creatures
Who sleep deep in the sea were stirred
Into life—and the iron hammered links
Of my mail shirt, these shining bits of metal
Woven across my breast, saved me
From death. A monster seized me, drew me
Swiftly toward the bottom, swimming with its claws
Tight in my flesh. But fate let me
Find its heart with my sword, hack myself
Free; I fought that beast's last battle,
Left it floating lifeless in the sea.

Chapter 9

"Other monsters crowded around me,
Continually attacking. I treated them politely,
Offering the edge of my razor-sharp sword.
But the feast, I think, did not please them, filled
Their evil bellies with no banquet-rich food,
Thrashing there at the bottom of the sea;
By morning they'd decided to sleep on the shore,
Lying on their backs, their blood spilled out
On the sand. Afterwards, sailors could cross
That sea-road and feel no fear; nothing
Would stop their passing. Then God's bright beacon
Appeared in the east, the water lay still,
And at last I could see the land, wind-swept
Cliff-walls at the edge of the coast. Fate saves
The living when they drive away death by themselves!
Lucky or not, nine was the number
Of sea-huge monsters I killed. What man,
Anywhere under Heaven's high arch, has fought
In such darkness, endured more misery, or been harder
Pressed? Yet I survived the sea, smashed
The monsters' hot jaws, swam home from my journey.
The swift-flowing waters swept me along
And I landed on Finnish soil. I've heard
No tales of you, Unferth, telling
Of such clashing terror, such contests in the night!
Brecca's battles were never so bold;
Neither he nor you can match me—and I mean
No boast, have announced no more than I know
To be true. And there's more: You murdered your
brothers,
Your own close kin. Words and bright wit
Won't help your soul; you'll suffer hell's fires,
Unferth, forever tormented. Ecglaf's
Proud son, if your hands were as hard, your heart
As fierce as you think it, no fool would dare
To raid your hall, ruin Herot
And oppress its prince, as Grendel has done.
But he's learned that terror is his alone,

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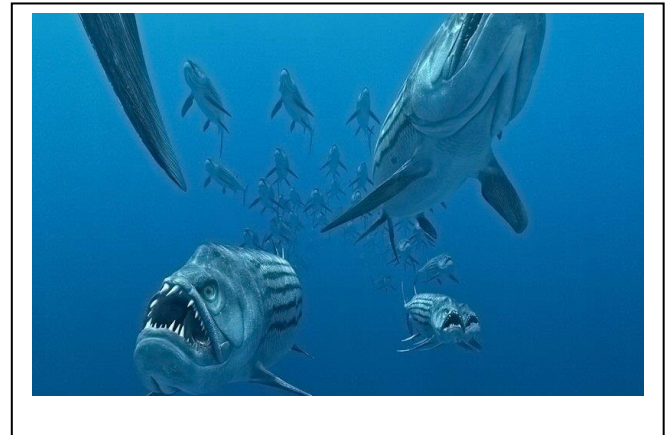
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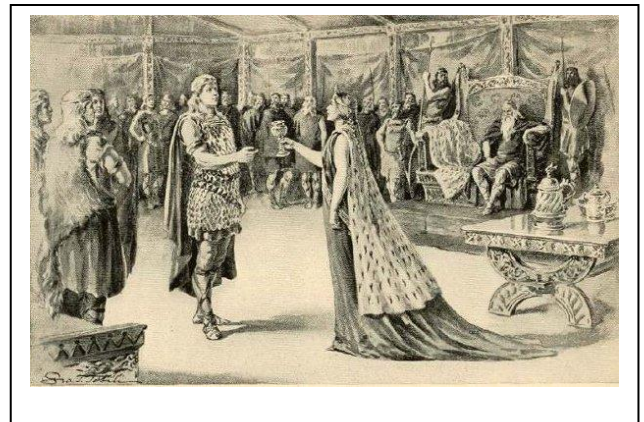
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Discovered he can come for your people with no fear
 Of reprisal; he's found no fighting, here,
 But only food, only delight.
 He murders as he likes, with no mercy, gorges
 And feasts on your flesh, and expects no trouble, 600
 No quarrel from the quiet Danes. Now
 The Geats will show him courage, soon
 He can test his strength in battle. And when the sun
 Comes up again, opening another
 Bright day from the south, anyone in Denmark 605
 May enter this hall: That evil will be gone!"
 Hrothgar, gray-haired and brave, sat happily
 Listening, the famous ring-giver sure,
 At last, that Grendel could be killed; he believed
 In Beowulf's bold strength and the firmness of his
 spirit. 610
 There was the sound of laughter, and the cheerful clanking
 Of cups, and pleasant words. Then Welthow,
 Hrothgar's gold-ringed queen, greeted
 The warriors; a noble woman who knew
 What was right, she raised a flowing cup 615
 To Hrothgar first, holding it high
 For the lord of the Danes to drink, wishing him
 Joy in that feast. The famous king
 Drank with pleasure and blessed their banquet.
 Then Welthow went from warrior to warrior, 620
 Pouring a portion from the jeweled cup
 For each, till the bracelet-wearing queen
 Had carried the mead-cup among them and it was
 Beowulf's
 Turn to be served. She saluted the Geats'
 Great prince, thanked God for answering her prayers, 625
 For allowing her hands the happy duty
 Of offering mead to a hero who would help
 Her afflicted people. He drank what she poured,
 Edgeth's brave son, then assured the Danish
 Queen that his heart was firm and his hands 630
 Ready:
 "When we crossed the sea, my comrades
 And I, I already knew that all
 My purpose was this: to win the good will
 Of your people or die in battle, pressed 635
 In Grendel's fierce grip. Let me live in greatness
 And courage, or here in this hall welcome
 My death!"
 Welthow was pleased with his words,
 His bright-tongued boasts; she carried them back 640
 To her lord, walked nobly across to his side.
 The feast went on, laughter and music
 And the brave words of warriors celebrating
 Their delight. Then Hrothgar rose, Healfdane's
 Son, heavy with sleep; as soon 645
 As the sun had gone, he knew that Grendel
 Would come to Herot, would visit that hall
 When night had covered the earth with its net
 And the shapes of darkness moved black and silent



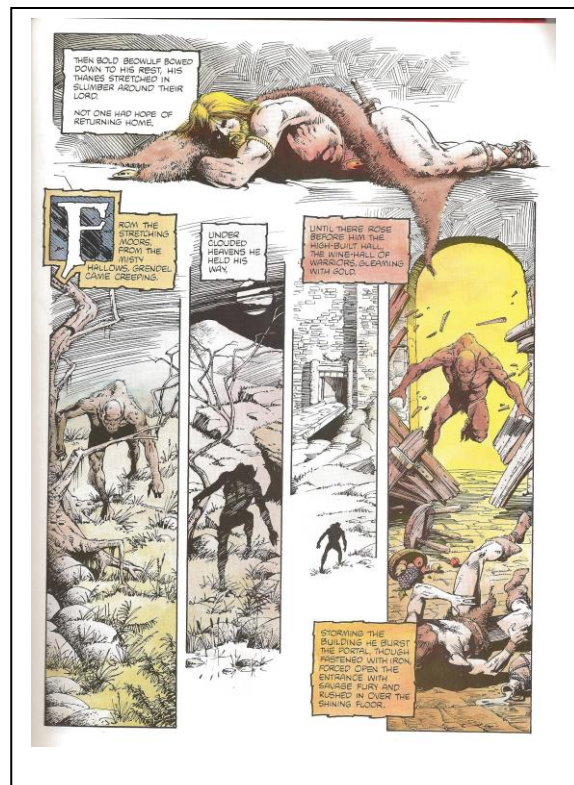
Through the world. Hrothgar's warriors rose with him. 650
 He went to Beowulf, embraced the Geats'
 Brave prince, wished him well, and hoped
 That Herot would be his to command. And then
 He declared:
²³"No one strange to this land 655
 Has ever been granted what I've given you,
 No one in all the years of my rule.
 Make this best of all mead-halls yours, and then
 Keep it free of evil, fight
 With glory in your heart! Purge Herot 660
 And your ship will sail home with its treasure-holds
 full."

Chapter 10

The feast ends. Beowulf and his men take the place at Hrothgar's followers and lie down to sleep in Herot. Beowulf, however, is wakeful, eager to meet his enemy. Beowulf removes his gear and armor, ordering his gear to be guarded till morning.

Chapter 11: The Battle with Grendel

Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty 710
 Hills and bogs, bearing God's hatred,
 Grendel came, hoping to kill
 Anyone he could trap on this trip to high Herot.
 He moved quickly through the cloudy night,
 Up from his swampland, sliding silently 715
 Toward that gold-shining hall. He had visited Hrothgar's
 Home before, knew the way—
 But never, before nor after that night,
 Found Herot defended so firmly, his reception
 So harsh. He journeyed, forever joyless, 720
 Straight to the door, then snapped it open,
 Tore its iron fasteners with a touch,
 And rushed angrily over the threshold.
 He strode quickly across the inlaid
 Floor, snarling and fierce: His eyes 725
 Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome
 Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall
 Crowded with sleeping warriors, stuffed
 With rows of young soldiers resting together.
 And his heart laughed, he relished the sight, 730
 Intended to tear the life from those bodies
 By morning; the monster's mind was hot
 With the thought of food and the feasting his belly
 Would soon know. But fate, that night, intended
 Grendel to gnaw the broken bones 735
 Of his last human supper. Human
 Eyes were watching his evil steps,
 Waiting to see his swift hard claws.
 Grendel snatched at the first Geat



²³ 655 Hrothgar speaking.

He came to, ripped him apart, cut
 His body to bits with powerful jaws,
 Drank the blood from his veins, and bolted
 Him down, hands and feet; death
 And Grendel's great teeth came together,
 Snapping life shut. Then he stepped to another
 Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws,
 Grasped at a strong-hearted wakeful sleeper
 —And was instantly seized himself, claws
 Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm.
 That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime,
 Knew at once that nowhere on earth
 Had he met a man whose hands were harder;
 His mind was flooded with fear—but nothing
 Could take his talons²⁴ and himself from that tight
 Hard grip. Grendel's one thought was to run
 From Beowulf, flee back to his marsh and hide there:
 This was a different Herot than the hall he had emptied.
 But Higlac's follower remembered his final
 Boast and, standing erect, stopped
 The monster's flight, fastened those claws
 In his fists till they cracked, clutched Grendel
 Closer. The infamous²⁵ killer fought
 For his freedom, wanting no flesh but retreat,
 Desiring nothing but escape; his claws
 Had been caught, he was trapped. That trip to Herot
 Was a miserable journey for the writhing²⁶ monster!
 The high hall rang, its roof boards swayed,
 And Danes shook with terror. Down
 The aisles the battle swept, angry
 And wild. Herot trembled, wonderfully
 Built to withstand the blows, the struggling
 Great bodies beating at its beautiful walls;
 Shaped and fastened with iron, inside
 And out, artfully worked, the building
 Stood firm. Its benches rattled, fell
 To the floor, gold-covered boards grating
 As Grendel and Beowulf battled across them.
 Hrothgar's wise men had fashioned Herot
 To stand forever; only fire,
 They had planned, could shatter what such skill had put
 Together, swallow in hot flames such splendor
 Of ivory and iron and wood. Suddenly
 The sounds changed, the Danes started
 In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible
 Screams of the Almighty's enemy sang
 In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain
 And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel's
 Taut throat, hell's captive caught in the arms
 Of him who of all the men on earth
 Was the strongest.

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²⁴ 754 talons: the sharp, hooked claws on birds of prey and some animals.

²⁵ 762 infamous: (adj.) having a bad reputation; notorious

²⁶ 766 writhing: (adj.) twisting, as in pain

Chapter 12

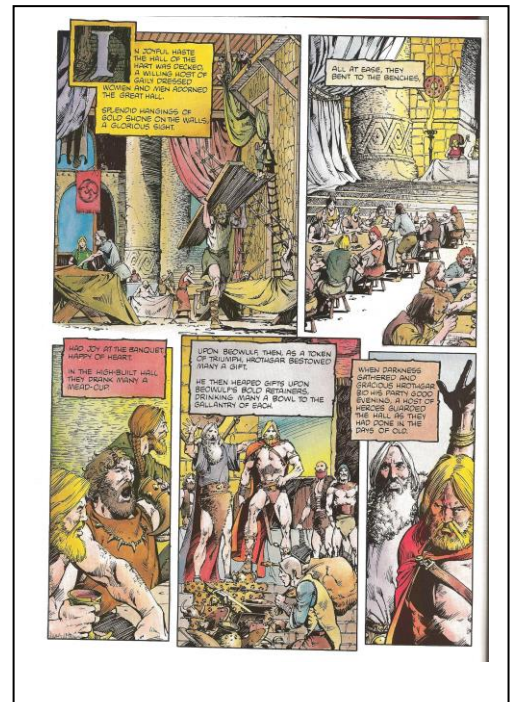
That mighty protector of men
Meant to hold the monster till its life
Leaped out, knowing the fiend was no use
To anyone in Denmark. All of Beowulf's
Band had jumped from their beds, ancestral
Swords raised and ready, determined
To protect their prince if they could. Their courage
Was great but all wasted: They could hack at Grendel
From every side, trying to open
A path for his evil soul, but their points
Could not hurt him, the sharpest and hardest iron
Could not scratch at his skin, for that sin-stained demon
Had bewitched all men's weapons, laid spells
That blunted every mortal man's blade.
And yet his time had come, his days
Were over, his death near; down
To hell he would go, swept groaning and helpless
To the waiting hands of still worse fiends.
Now he discovered—once the afflictor
Of men, tormentor of their days—what it meant
To feud with Almighty God: Grendel
Saw that his strength was deserting him, his claws
Bound fast, Higlac's brave follower tearing at
His hands. The monster's hatred rose higher,
But his power had gone. He twisted in pain,
And the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder
Snapped, muscle and bone split
And broke. The battle was over, Beowulf
Had been granted new glory: Grendel escaped,
But wounded as he was could flee to his den,
His miserable hole at the bottom of the marsh,
Only to die, to wait for the end
Of all his days. And after that bloody
Combat the Danes laughed with delight.
He who had come to them from across the sea,
Bold and strong-minded, had driven affliction
Off, purged Herot clean. He was happy,
Now, with that night's fierce work; the Danes
Had been served as he'd boasted he'd serve them;
Beowulf,
A prince of the Geats, had killed Grendel,
Ended the grief, the sorrow, the suffering
Forced on Hrothgar's helpless people
By a bloodthirsty fiend. No Dane doubted
The victory, for the proof, hanging high
From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the
monster's
Arm, claw and shoulder and all.



Chapter 13

And then, in the morning, crowds surrounded
Herot, warriors coming to that hall

From faraway lands, princes and leaders
 Of men hurrying to behold the monster's
 Great staggering tracks. They gaped with no sense
 Of sorrow, felt no regret for his suffering,
 Went tracing his bloody footprints, his beaten
 And lonely flight, to the edge of the lake
 Where he'd dragged his corpselike way, doomed
 And already weary of his vanishing life.
 The water was bloody, steaming and boiling
 In horrible pounding waves, heat
 Sucked from his magic veins; but the swirling
 Surf had covered his death, hidden
 Deep in murky darkness his miserable
 End, as hell opened to receive him.
 Then old and young rejoiced, turned back
 From that happy pilgrimage, mounted their hard-
 hooved
 Horses, high-spirited stallions, and rode them
 Slowly toward Herot again, retelling
 Beowulf's bravery as they jogged along.
 And over and over they swore that nowhere
 On earth or under the spreading sky
 Or between the seas, neither south nor north,
 Was there a warrior worthier to rule over men.
 (But no one meant Beowulf's praise to belittle
 Hrothgar, their kind and gracious king!)



Chapter 14 - 18

Hrothgar stares at the arm of Grendel hanging from the rafters. Unferth grows quiet and decides to give up his quarrel with Beowulf. Hrothgar orders Herot to be cleansed and a huge celebration that takes place in Herot. Hrothgar and Welthow honor Beowulf with a huge treasure consisting of horses, weapons, and Denmark's treasures which are considered noble gifts of mail shirts and golden arm bands and Welthow handed Beowulf one of the most beautiful necklaces ever known. Everyone retires for the evening, thinking that Denmark is now safe; however, a monster, goes to Herot to avenge her son's death.

Chapter 19: A Mother's Revenge

So she reached Herot,
 Where the Danes slept as though already dead;
 Her visit ended their good fortune, reversed
 The bright vane of their luck. No female, no matter
 How fierce, could have come with a man's strength,
 Fought with the power and courage men fight with,
 Smashing their shining swords, their bloody,
 Hammer-forged blades onto boar-headed helmets,
 Slashing and stabbing with the sharpest of point.
 The soldiers raised their shields and drew
 Those gleaming swords, swung them above
 The piled-up benches, leaving their mail shirts
 And their helmets where they'd lain when the terror
 took them hold of them.
 To save her life she moved still faster,
 Took a single victim and fled from the hall,
 Running to the moors, discovered, her supper
 Assured sheltered in her dripping claws.



She'd taken Hrothgar's closest friend,²⁷
 The man he most loved of all men on earth;
 She killed a glorious soldier, cut
 A noble life short. No Geat could have stopped her:
 Beowulf and his band has been given better 1300
 Beds; sleep had come to them in a different
 Hall. Then all Herot burst into shouts:
 She had carried off Grendel's claw. Sorrow
 Had returned to Denmark. They'd traded deaths,
 Danes and monsters, and no one had won, 1305
 Both had lost!

Beowulf is awakened and called for again. Hrothgar is truly remorseful at losing his closest companion, Esher. He further relates to Beowulf that he had no idea of another monster other than what his people had told him. In one of the most famous versus in the epic, the old king describes where Grendel and his mother are said to live.

Chapter 20

"I've heard that my people, peasants working 1345
 In the fields, have seen a pair of such fiends
 Wandering in the moors and marshes, giant
 Monsters living in those desert lands.
 And they've said to my wise men that, as well as
 they could see,
 One of the devils was a female creature. 1350
 The other, they say, walked through the wilderness
 Like a man—but mightier than any man.
 They were frightened, and they fled, hoping to
 find help
 In Herot. They named the huge one Grendel:
 If he had a father no one knew him, 1355
 Or whether there'd been others before these two,
 Hidden evil before hidden evil.
 They live in secret places, windy
 Cliffs, wolf-dens where water pours
 From the rocks, then runs underground, where mist 1360
 Steams like black clouds, and the groves of trees
 Growing out over their lake are all covered
 With frozen spray, and wind down snakelike
 Roots that reach as far as the water
 And help keep it dark. At night that lake 1365
 Burns like a torch. No one knows its bottom,
 No wisdom reaches such depths. A deer,
 Hunted through the woods by packs of hounds,
 A stag with great horns, though driven through the
 forest
 From faraway places, prefers to die 1370
 On those shores, refuses to save its life
 In that water. It isn't far, nor is it
 A pleasant spot! When the wind stirs
 And storms, waves splash toward the sky,
 As dark as the air, as black as the rain 1375
 That the heavens weep. Our only help,

²⁷ 1296 Hrothgar's closest friend: Esher

Again, lies with you. Grendel's mother
Is hidden in her terrible home, in a place
You've not seen. Seek it, if you dare! Save us,
Once more, and again twisted gold,
Heaped-up ancient treasure, will reward you
For the battle you win!" 1380

Chapter 21

Beowulf spoke:

"Let your sorrow end! It is better for us all
To avenge our friends, not mourn them forever. 1385
Each of us will come to the end of this life
On earth; he who can earn it should fight
For the glory of his name; fame after death
Is the noblest of goals. Arise, guardian
Of this kingdom, let us go, as quickly as we can, 1390
And have a look at this lady monster.
I promise you this: she'll find no shelter,
No hole in the ground, no towering tree,
No deep bottom of a lake, where her sins can hide.
Be patient for one more day of misery; 1395
I ask for no longer."

The old king leaped
To his feet, gave thanks to God for such words.
Then Hrothgar's horse was brought, saddled
And bridled. The Danes' wise ruler rode, 1400
Stately and splendid; shield-bearing soldiers
Marched at his side. The monster's tracks
Led them through the forest; they followed her heavy
Feet, that had swept straight across
The shadowy waste land, her burden the lifeless 1405
Body of the best of Hrothgar's men.
The trail took them up towering, rocky
Hills, and over narrow, winding
Paths they had never seen, down steep
And slippery cliffs where creatures from deep 1410
In the earth hid in their holes. Hrothgar
Rode in front, with a few of his most knowing
Men, to find their way. Then suddenly,
Where clumps of trees bent across
Cold gray stones, they came to a dismal 1415
Wood; below them was the lake, its water
Bloody and bubbly. And the Danes shivered,
Miserable, might men tormented
By grief seeing, there on that cliff
Above the water, Esher's bloody 1420
Head. They looked down at the lake, felt
How its heat rose up, watched the waves'
Blood-stained swirling. Their battle horns sounded,
Then sounded again. Then they set down their weapons.

They could see the water crawling with snakes, 1425
Fantastic serpents swimming in the boiling
Lake, and sea beasts lying on the rocks
--The kind that infest the ocean, in the early
Dawn, often ending some ship's



Journey with their wild jaws. They rushed	1430
Angrily out of sight, when the battle horns blew.	
Beowulf aimed an arrow at one	
Of the beasts, swimming sluggishly away,	
And the point pierced its hide, stabbed	
To its heart; its life leaked out, death	1435
Swept it off. Quickly before	
The dying monster could escape, they hooked	
Its thrashing body with their curved boar-spears,	
Fought it to land, drew it up on the bluff,	
Then stood and stared at the incredible wave-roamer,	1440
Covered with strange scales and horrible. Then Beowulf	
Began to fasten on his armor.	
Not afraid for his life but knowing the woven	
Mail, with its hammered links, could save	
That life when he lowered himself into the lake,	1445
Keep slimy monsters' claws from snatching at	
His heart, preserve him for the battle he was sent	
To fight. Hrothgar's helmet would defend him;	
That ancient, shining treasure, encircled	
With hard-rolled metal, set there by some smith's	1450
Long dead hand, would block all battle	
Swords, stop all blades from cutting at him	
When he'd swum toward the bottom, gone down	
in the surging	
Water, deep toward the swirling sands.	
And Unferth helped him, Hrothgar's courtier	1455
Lent him a famous weapon, a fine,	
Hilted old sword named Hrunting; it had	
An iron blade, etched and shining	
And hardened in blood. No one who'd worn it	
Into battle, swung it in dangerous places,	1460
Daring and brave, had ever been deserted—	
Nor was Beowulf's journey the first time it was taken	
To an enemy's camp, or asked to support	
Some hero's courage and win him glory.	
Unferth had tried to forget his greeting	1465
To Beowulf, his drunken speech of welcome;	
A might warrior, he lent his weapon	
To a better one. Only Beowulf would risk	
His life in that lake; Unferth was afraid,	
Gave up that chance to work wonders, win glory	1470
And a hero's fame. But Beowulf and fear	
Were strangers; he stood ready to dive into battle.	

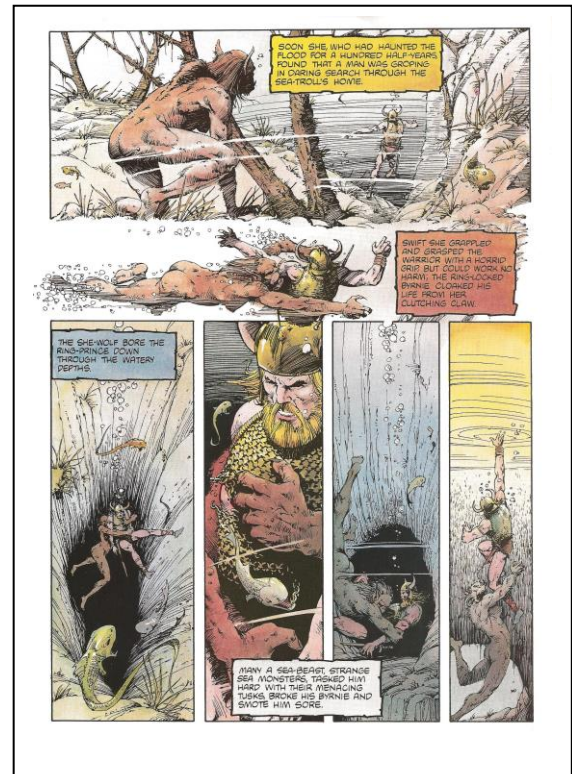
Beowulf tells Unferth, "Let my famous old sword stay in your hands: / I will shape glory with Hrunting, or death (1490) / will hurry me from this earth!"

Carrying the sword Hrunting, Beowulf goes to the lake where the monster's mother has her underwater lair. Then, fully armed, he makes a heroic dive to the depths of this watery Hell.

Chapter 22: The Monster's Mother

He leaped into the lake, would not wait for anyone's
Answer; the heaving water covered him
Over. For hours he sank through the waves; 1495
At last he saw the mud of the bottom.
And all at once the greedy she-wolf
Who'd ruled those waters for half a hundred
Years discovered him, saw that a creature
From above had come to explore the bottom 1500
Of her wet world. She welcomed him in her claws,
Clutched at him savagely but could not harm him,
Tried to work her fingers through the tight
Ring-woven mail on his breast, but tore
And scratched in vain. Then she carried him, armor 1505
And sword and all, to her home; he struggled
To free his weapon, and failed. The fight
Brought other monsters swimming to see
Her catch, a host of sea beasts who beat at
His mail shirt, stabbing with tusks and teeth 1510
As they followed along. Then he realized, suddenly,
That she'd brought him into someone's battle-hall,
And there the water's heat could not hurt him,
Nor anything in the lake attack him through
The building's high-arching roof. A brilliant 1515
Light burned all around him, the lake
Itself like a fiery flame.

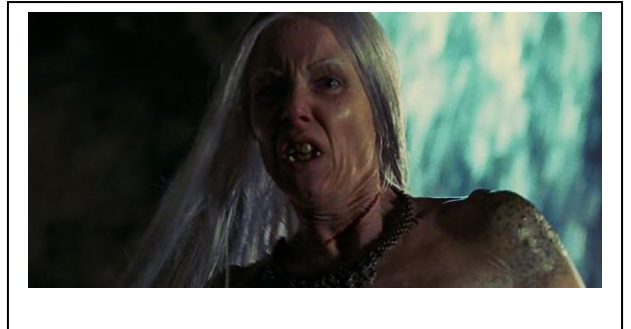
Then he saw
The mighty water witch, and swung his sword,
His ring-marked blade, straight at her head; 1520
The iron sang its fierce song,
Sang Beowulf's strength. But her guest
Discovered that no sword could slice her evil
Skin, that Hrunting could not hurt her, was useless
Now when he needed it. They wrestled, she ripped 1525
And tore and clawed at him, bit holes in his helmet,
And that too failed him; for the first time in years
Of being worn to war it would earn no glory;
It was the last time anyone would wear it. But Beowulf
Longed only for fame, leaped back 1530
Into battle. He tossed his sword aside,
Angry; the steel-edged blade lay where
He'd dropped it. If weapons were useless he'd use
His hands, the strength in his fingers. So fame
Comes to the men who mean to win it 1535
And care about nothing else! He raised
His arms and seized her by the shoulder; anger
Doubled his strength, he threw her to the floor.
She fell, Grendel's fierce mother, and the Geats'
Proud prince was ready to leap on her. But she rose 1540
At once and repaid him with her clutching claws,
Wildly tearing at him. He was weary, that best
And strongest of soldiers; his feet stumbled
And in an instant she had him down, held helpless.
Squatting with her weight on his stomach, she drew 1545
A dagger, brown with dried blood and prepared



To avenge her only son. But he was stretched
 On his back, and her stabbing blade was blunted
 By the woven mail shirt he wore on his chest.
 The hammered links held; the point 1550
 Could not touch him. He'd have traveled to the bottom
 of the earth,
 Edgeth's son, and died there, if that shining
 Woven metal had not helped—and Holy
 God, who sent him victory, gave judgment
 For truth and right, Ruler of the Heavens, 1555
 Once Beowulf was back on his feet and fighting.

Chapter 23

Then he saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy
 Sword, hammered by giants, strong
 And blessed with their magic, the best of all weapons
 But so massive that no ordinary man could lift 1560
 Its carved and decorated length. He drew it
 From its scabbard,²⁸ broke the chain on its hilt,
 And then, savage, now, angry
 And desperate, lifted it high over his head
 And struck with all the strength he had left, 1565
 Caught her in the neck and cut it through,
 Broke bones and all. Her body fell
 To the floor, lifeless, the sword was wet
 With her blood, and Beowulf rejoiced at the sight.
 The brilliant light shone, suddenly, 1570
 As though burning in that hall, and as bright as
 Heaven's
 Own candle, lit in the sky. He looked
 At her home, then following along the wall
 Went walking, his hands tight on the sword,
 His heart still angry. He was hunting another 1575
 Dead monster, and took his weapon with him
 For final revenge against Grendel's vicious
 Attacks, his nighttime raids, over
 And over, coming to Herot when Hrothgar's
 Men slept, killing them in their beds, 1580
 Eating some on the spot, fifteen
 Or more, and running to his loathsome moor
 With another such sickening meal waiting
 In his pouch. But Beowulf repaid him for those visits,
 Found him lying dead in his corner, 1585
 Armless, exactly as that fierce fighter
 Had sent him out from Herot, then struck off
 His head with a single swift blow. The body
 Jerked for the last time, then lay still. . . .
 The wise old warriors who surrounded Hrothgar, 1590
 Like him staring into the monsters' lake,
 Saw the waves surging and blood
 Spurting through. They spoke about Beowulf,
 All the graybeards, whispered together



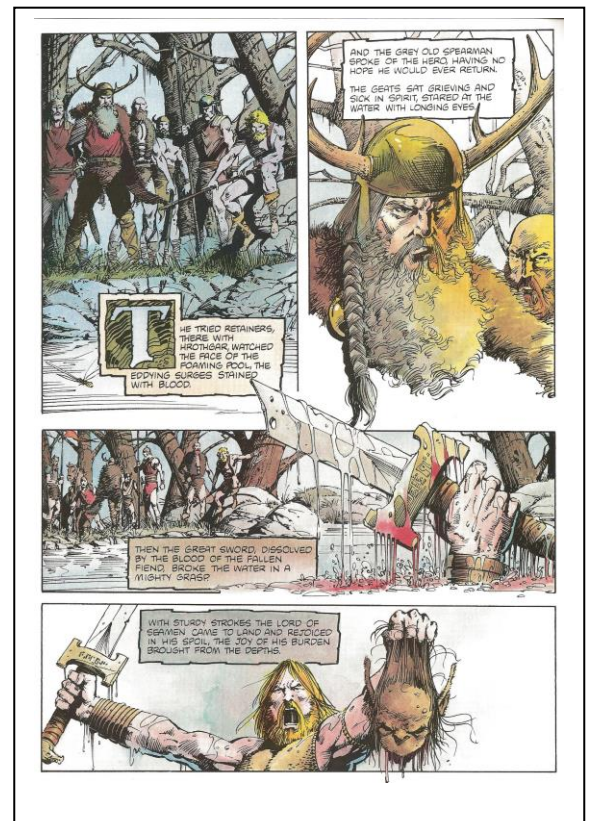
²⁸ 1562 **scabbard**: a case that protects a sword's blade. **hilt**: the sword's handle, which protrudes from the scabbard.

And said that hope was gone, that the hero
 Had lost fame and his life at once, and would never
 Return to the living, come back as triumphant
 As he had left; almost all agreed that Grendel's
 Mighty mother, the she-wolf, had killed him.
 The sun slid over past noon, went further
 Down. The Danes gave up, left
 The lake and went home, Hrothgar with them.
 The Geats stayed, sat sadly, watching,
 Imagining they saw their lord but not believing
 They would ever see him again.

--Then the sword
 Melted, blood-soaked, dripping down
 Like water, disappearing like ice when the world's
 Eternal Lord loosens invisible
 Fetters and unwinds icicles and frost
 As only He can, He who rules
 Time and seasons, He who is truly
 God. The monsters' hall was full of
 Rich treasures, but all that Beowulf took
 Was Grendel's head and the hilt of the giants'
 Jeweled sword; the rest of that ring-marked
 Blade had dissolved in Grendel's seaming
 Blood, boiling even after his death.

And then the battle's only survivor
 Swam up and away from those silent corpses;
 The water was calm and clean, the whole
 Huge lake peaceful once the demons how'd lived in it
 Were dead

Then that noble protector of all seamen²⁹
 Swam to land, rejoicing in the heavy
 Burdens he was bringing with him. He
 And all his glorious band of Geats
 Thanked God that their leader had come back unharmed;
 They left the lake together. The Geats
 Carried Beowulf's helmet, and his mail shirt.
 Behind them the water slowly thickened
 As the monsters' blood came seeping up.
 They walked quickly, happily, across
 Roads all of them remembered, left
 The lake and the cliffs alongside it, brave men
 Staggering under the weight of Grendel's skull,
 Too heavy for fewer than four of them to handle –
 Two on each side of the spear jammed through it –
 Yet proud of their ugly load and determined
 That the Danes, seated in Herot, should see it.
 Soon, fourteen Geats arrived
 At the hall, bold and warlike, and with Beowulf,
 Their lord and leader, they walked on the mead-hall
 Green. Then the Geats' brave prince entered
 Herot, covered with glory from the daring
 Battles he had fought; he sought Hrothgar
 To salute him and show Grendel's head.



²⁹ 1623 that noble protector of all sea-men: Beowulf. This line refers to a scene later in the epic in which Beowulf asks the Geats, as he lies dying, to build him a tower very much like a lighthouse at the water's edge.

He carried that terrible trophy by the hair,
 Brought it straight to where the Danes sat,
 Drinking, the queen among them. It was a weird
 And wonderful sight, and the warriors stared.

1650

Chapters 24 to 30

Beowulf hands the head of Grendel and the hilt of the magic sword over to Hrothgar. Beowulf explains to Hrothgar "Hrunting, / Unferth's noble weapon, could do nothing," (lines 1668-1669). In amazement, Hrothgar stares at the face of what has been Denmark's evil and the hilt of the magic sword. Hrothgar throws another huge celebration in Beowulf's honor and once again shares his treasures with Beowulf and boasts of how Beowulf's name will live on for all eternity. A glorious celebration ensues and Beowulf rests for the evening. Beowulf grew restless, longing to return to Geatland. With Hrothgar's approval, Beowulf returns to Geatland but not before accepting Hrunting, the sword offered to him by Unferth. Beowulf graciously accepts Hrunting

Beowulf returns to his lord, Higlac, and delivers a dozen new gifts from Hrothgar to Higlac and Higd, Higlac's noble queen and their son, Herdred. In return, Higlac gave Beowulf seven thousand hides of land, houses, ground, buildings and fields.

Chapter 31

Afterwards, in the time when Higlac was dead
 And Herdred, his son, who'd ruled the Geats
 After his father, had followed him into darkness-
 Killed in battle with the Swedes, who smashed
 His shield, cut through the soldiers surrounding
 Their king—then, when Higd's one son
 Was gone, Beowulf ruled in Geatland,
 Took the throne he'd refused, once,
 And held it long and well. He was old
 With years and wisdom, fifty winters
 A king, when a dragon awoke from its darkness
 And dreams and brought terror to his people. The beast
 Had slept in a huge stone tower, with a hidden
 Path beneath; a man stumbled on
 The entrance, went in, discovered the ancient
 Treasure, the pagan jewels and gold
 The dragon had been guarding, and dazzled and greedy
 Stole a gem studded cup, and fled.
 But now the dragon hid nothing, neither
 The theft nor itself; it swept through the darkness,
 And all Geatland knew its anger.

2200

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2210

2215

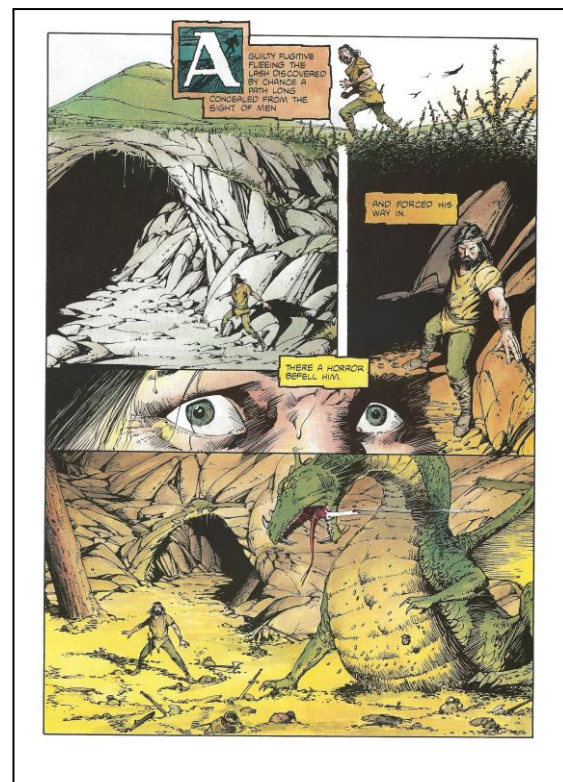
2220

Chapter 32

But the thief had not come to steal; he stole,
 And roused the dragon, not from desire
 But need. He was someone's slave, had been beaten
 By his masters, had run from all men's sight,
 But with no place to hide; then he found the hidden
 Path, and used it. And once inside,
 Seeing the sleeping beast, staring as it
 Yawned and stretched, not wanting to wake it,
 Terror-struck, he turned and ran for his life,
 Taking the jeweled cup.

2225

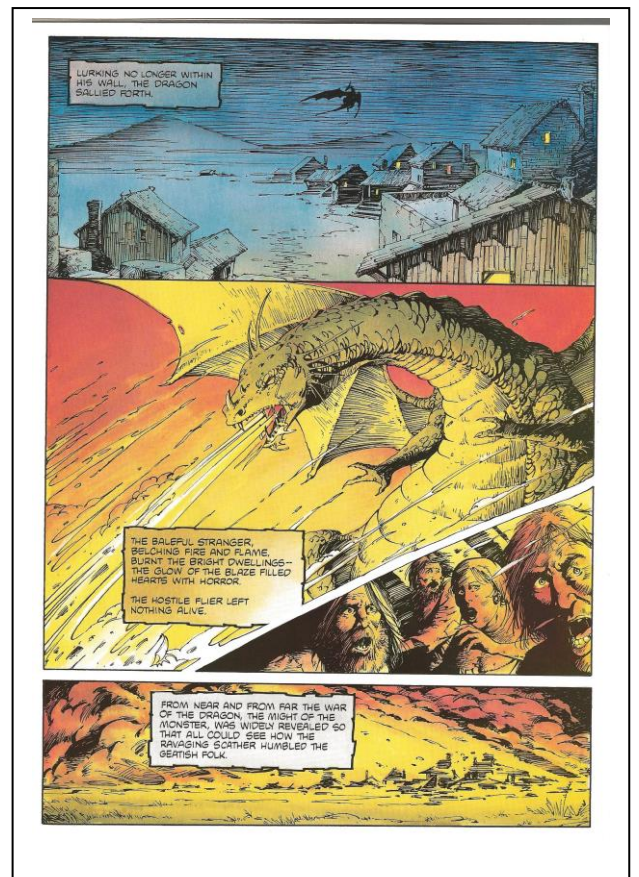
2230



So mankind's enemy, the mighty beast,
 Slept in those stone walls for hundreds
 Of years; a runaway slave roused it, 2280
 Stole a jeweled cup and bought
 His master's forgiveness, begged for mercy
 And was pardoned when his delighted lord took the present
 He bore, turned it in his hands and stared
 At the ancient carvings. The cup brought peace 2285
 To a slave, pleased his master, but stirred
 A dragon's anger. It turned, hunting
 The thief's tracks, and found them, saw
 Where its visitor had come and gone. He'd survived,
 Had come close enough to touch its scaly 2290
 Head and yet lived, as it lifted its cavernous
 Jaws, through the grace of almighty God
 And a pair of quiet, quick moving feet.
 The dragon followed his steps, anxious
 To find the man who had robbed it of silver 2295
 And sleep; it circled around and around
 The tower, determined to catch him, but could not,
 He had run too fast, the wilderness was empty.
 The beast went back to its treasure, planning
 A bloody revenge, and found what was missing, 2300
 Saw what thieving hands had stolen.
 Then it crouched on the stones, counting off
 The hours till the Almighty's candle went out,
 And evening came, and wild with anger
 It could fly burning across the land, lulling 2305
 And destroying with its breath. Then the sun was gone
 And its heart was glad: glowing with rage
 It left the tower, impatient to repay
 Its enemies. The people suffered, everyone
 Lived in terror, but when Beowulf had learned 2310
 Of their trouble his fate was worse, and came quickly.

Chapter 33

Vomiting fire and smoke, the dragon
 Burned down their homes. They watched in horror
 As the flames rose up: the angry monster
 Meant to leave nothing alive. And the signs 2315
 Of its anger flickered and glowed in the darkness,
 Visible for miles, tokens of its hate
 And its cruelty, spread like a warning to the Geats
 Who had broken its rest. Then it hurried back
 To its tower, to its hidden treasure, before dawn 2320
 Could come. It had wrapped its flames around
 The Geats; now it trusted in stone
 Walls, and its strength, to protect it. But they would not.
 Then they came to Beowulf, their king, and announced
 That his hall, his throne, the best of buildings, 2325
 Had melted away in the dragon's burning
 Breath. Their words brought misery, Beowulf's
 Sorrow beat at his heart: he accused
 Himself of breaking God's law, of bringing
 The Almighty's anger down on his people. 2330



Reproach pounded in his breast, gloomy
 And dark, and the world seemed a different place.
 But the hall was gone, the dragon's molten
 Breath had licked across it, burned it
 To ashes, near the shore it had guarded. The Geats 2335
 Deserved revenge; Beowulf, their leader
 And lord, began to plan it, ordered
 A battle-shield shaped of iron, knowing that
 Wood would be useless, that no linden shield
 Could help him, protect him, in the flaming heat 2340
 Of the beast's breath. That noble prince
 Would end his days on earth, soon,
 Would leave this brief life, but would take the dragon
 With him, tear it from the heaped-up treasure
 It had guarded so long. And he'd go to it alone, 2345
 Scorning to lead soldiers against such
 An enemy: he saw nothing to fear, thought nothing
 Of the beast's claws, or wings, or flaming
 Jaws—

Chapter 35

And Beowulf uttered his final boast: 2510
 "I've never known fear; as a youth I fought
 In endless battles. I am old, now,
 But I will fight again, seek fame still,
 If the dragon hiding in his tower dares
 To face me." 2515

Then he said farewell to his followers,
 Each in his turn, for the last time:

"I'd use no sword, no weapon, if this beast
 Could be killed without it, crushed to death
 Lie Grendel, gripped in my hands and torn 2520
 Limb from limb. But his breath will be burning
 Hot, poison will pour from his tongue.
 I feel no shame, with shield and sword
 And armor, against this monster: when he comes to me
 I mean to stand, not run from his shooting
 Flames, stand till fate decides 2525
 Which of us wins. My heart is firm,
 My hands calm: I need no hot
 Words. Wait for me close by, my friends.
 We shall see, soon, who will survive
 This bloody battle, stand when the fighting
 Is done. No one else could do
 What I mean to, here, no man but me
 Could hope to defeat this monster. No one
 Could try. And this dragon's treasure, his gold 2530
 And everything hidden in that tower, will be mine
 Or war will sweep me to a bitter death!" 2535

Then Beowulf rose, still brave, still strong,
 And with his shield at his side, and a mail shirt on his breast,
 Strode calmly, confidently, toward the tower, under 2540
 The rocky cliffs: no coward could have walked there!
 And then he who'd endured dozens of desperate
 Battles, who'd stood boldly while swords and shields



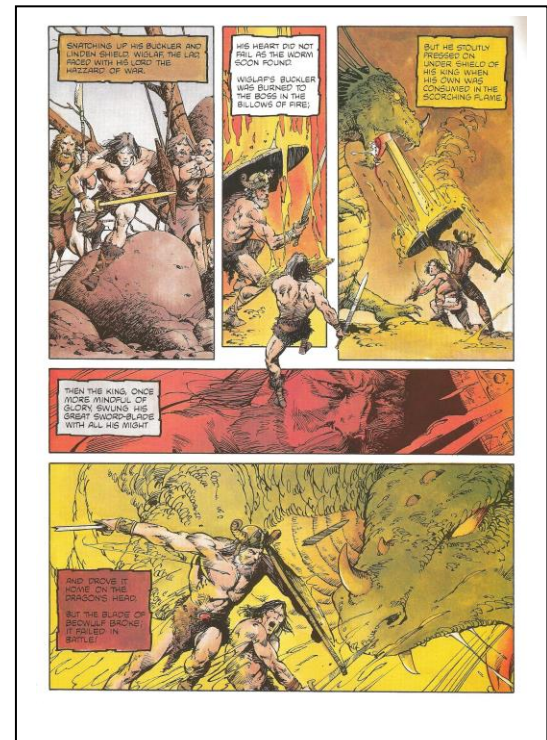
Clashed, the best of kings, saw
Huge stone arches and felt the heat
Of the dragon's breath, flooding down
Through the hidden entrance, too hot for anyone.
To stand, a streaming current of fire
And smoke that blocked all passage. And the Geats'
Lord and leader, angry, lowered
His sword and roared out a battle cry,
A call so loud and dear that it reached through
The hoary rock, hung in the dragon's
Ear. The beast rose, angry,
Knowing a man had come—and then nothing
But war could have followed. Its breath came first,
A steaming cloud pouring from the stone,
Then the earth itself shook. Beowulf
Swung his shield into place, held it
In front of him, facing the entrance. The dragon
Coiled and uncoiled, its heart urging it
Into battle. Beowulf's ancient sword
Was waiting, unsheathed, his sharp and gleaming
Blade. The beast came closer; both of them
Were ready, each set on slaughter. The Geats'
Great prince stood firm, unmoving, prepared
Behind his high shield, waiting in his shining
Armor. The monster came quickly toward him,
Pouring out fire and smoke, hurrying
To its fate. Flames beat at the iron
Shield, and for a time it held, protected
Beowulf as he'd planned; then it began to melt,
And for the first time in his life that famous prince
Fought with fate against him, with glory
Denied him. He knew it, but he raised his sword
And struck at the dragon's scaly hide.
The ancient blade broke, bit into
The monster's skin, drew blood, but cracked
And failed him before it went deep enough, helped him
Less than he needed. The dragon leaped
With pain, thrashed and beat at him, spouting
Murderous flames, spreading them everywhere.
And the Geats' ring-giver did not boast of glorious
Victories in other wars: his weapon
Had failed him, deserted him, now when he needed it
Most, that excellent sword. Edgeth's
Famous son stared at death,
Unwilling to leave this world, to exchange it
For a dwelling in some distant place—a journey
Into darkness that all men must make, as death
Ends their few brief hours on earth.
Quickly, the dragon came at him, encouraged
As Beowulf fell back; its breath flared,
And he suffered, wrapped around in swirling
Flames—a king, before, but now
A beaten warrior. None of his comrades
Came to him, helped him, his brave and noble
Followers; they ran for their lives, fled
Deep in a wood. And only one of them



Remained, stood there, miserable, remembering,
As a good man must, what kinship should mean. 2600

Chapter 36: History on Wiglaf

His name was Wiglaf, he was Wexstan's son
And a good soldier; his family had been Swedish,
Once. Watching Beowulf, he could see
How his king was suffering, burning. Remembering 2605
Everything his lord and cousin had given him,
Armor and gold and the great estates
Wexstan's family enjoyed, Wiglaf's
Mind was made up; he raised his yellow
Shield and drew his sword-an ancient 2610
Weapon that had once belonged to Onela's
Nephew, and that Wexstan had won, killing
The prince when he fled from Sweden, sought safety
With Herdred, and found death. And Wiglaf's father
Had carried the dead man's armor, and his sword, 2615
To Onela, and the king had said nothing, only
Given him armor and sword and all,
Everything his rebel nephew had owned
And lost when he left this life. And Wexstan
Had kept those shining gifts, held them 2620
For years, waiting for his son to use them,
Wear them as honorably and well as once
His father had done; then Wexstan died
And Wiglaf was his heir, inherited treasures
And weapons and land. He'd never worn 2625
That armor, fought with that sword, until Beowulf
Called him to his side, led him into war.
But his soul did not melt, his sword was strong;
The dragon discovered his courage, and his weapon,
When the rush of battle brought them together. 2630
And Wiglaf, his heart heavy, uttered
The kind of words his comrades deserved:
"I remember how we sat in the mead-hall, drinking
And boasting of how brave we'd be when Beowulf
Needed us, he who gave us these swords 2635
And armor: all of us swore to repay him,
When the time came, kindness for kindness
—With our lives, if he needed them. He allowed us to join him,
Chose us from all his great army, thinking
Our boasting words had some weight, believing 2640
Our promises, trusting our swords. He took us
For soldiers, for men. He meant to kill
This monster himself, our mighty king,
Fight this battle alone and unaided,
As in the days when his strength and daring dazzled 2645
Men's eyes. But those days are over and gone
And now our lord must lean on younger
Arms. And we must go to him, while angry
Flames burn at his flesh, help
Our glorious king! By almighty God, 2650
I'd rather burn myself than see
Flames swirling around my lord.



And who are we to carry home
Our shields before we've slain his enemy
And ours, to run back to our homes with Beowulf 2655
So hard-pressed here? I swear that nothing
He ever did deserved an end
Like this, dying miserably and alone,
Butchered by this savage beast: we swore
That these swords and armor were each for us all!" 2660

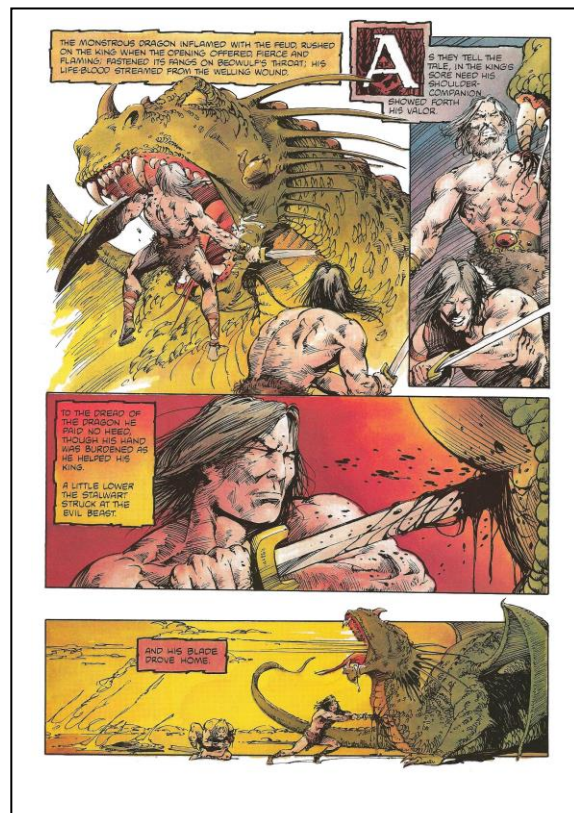
Then he ran to his king, crying encouragement
As he dove through the dragon's deadly fumes:
"Beloved Beowulf, remember how you boasted,
Once, that nothing in the world would ever
Destroy your fame: fight to keep it, 2665
Now, be strong and brave, my noble
King, protecting life and fame
Together. My sword will fight at your side!"

The dragon heard him, the man hating monster,
And was angry; shining with surging flames 2670
It came for him, anxious to return his visit.
Waves of fire swept at his shield
And the edge began to burn. His mail shirt
Could not help him, but before his hands dropped
The blazing wood Wiglaf jumped 2675
Behind Beowulf's shield; his own was burned
To ashes. Then the famous old hero, remembering
Days of glory, lifted what was left
Of Nagling, his ancient-sword, and swung it 2680
With all his strength, smashed the gray
Blade into the beast's head. But then Nagling
Broke to pieces, as iron always
Had in Beowulf's hands. His arms
Were too strong, the hardest blade could not help him
The most wonderfully worked. He carried them to war 2685
But fate had decreed that the Geats' great king
Would be no better for any weapon.

Then the monster charged again, vomiting
Fire, wild with pain, rushed out
Fierce and dreadful, its fear forgotten. 2690
Watching for its chance it drove its tusks
Into Beowulf's neck; he staggered, the blood
Came flooding forth, fell like rain.

Chapter 37

And then when Beowulf needed him most
Wiglaf showed his courage, his strength 2695
And skill, and the boldness he was born with ignoring
The dragon's head, he helped his lord
By striking lower down. The sword
Sank in; his hand was burned, but the shining
Blade had done its work, the dragon's
Belching flames began to flicker 2700
And die away. And Beowulf drew
His battle-sharp dagger: the blood-stained old king
Still knew what he was doing. Quickly, he cut
The beast in half, slit it apart. 2705



It fell, their courage had killed it, two noble
 Cousins had joined in the dragon's death.
 Yet what they did all men must do
 When the time comes! But the triumph was the last
 Beowulf would ever earn, the end 2710
 Of greatness and life together. The wound
 In his neck began to swell and grow;
 He could feel something stirring, burning
 In his veins, a stinging venom, and knew
 The beast's fangs had left it. He fumbled 2715
 Along the wall, found a slab
 Of stone, and dropped down; above him he saw
 Huge stone arches and heavy posts,
 Holding up the roof of that giant hall.
 Then Wiglaf's gentle hands bathed 2720
 The blood-stained prince, his glorious lord,
 Weary of war, and loosened his helmet.

Beowulf spoke, in spite of the swollen,
 Livid wound, knowing he'd unwound
 His string of days on earth, seen 2725
 As much as God would grant him; all worldly
 Pleasure was gone, as life would go,
 Soon:

"I'd leave my armor to my son,
 Now, if God had given me an heir,
 A child born of my body, his life 2730
 Created from mine. I've worn this crown
 For fifty winters: no neighboring people
 Have tried to threaten the Geats, sent soldiers
 Against us or talked of terror. My days 2735
 Have gone by as fate willed, waiting
 For its word to be spoken, ruling as well
 As I knew how, swearing no unholy oaths,
 Seeking no lying wars. I can leave
 This life happy; I can die, here,
 Knowing the Lord of all life has never
 Watched me wash my sword in blood
 Born of my own family. Beloved
 Wiglaf, go, quickly, find
 The dragon's treasure: we've taken its life,
 But its gold is ours, too. Hurry,
 Bring me ancient silver, precious
 Jewels, shining armor and gems,
 Before I die. Death will be softer,
 Leaving life and this people I've ruled
 So long, if I look at this last of all prizes."



Chapter 38

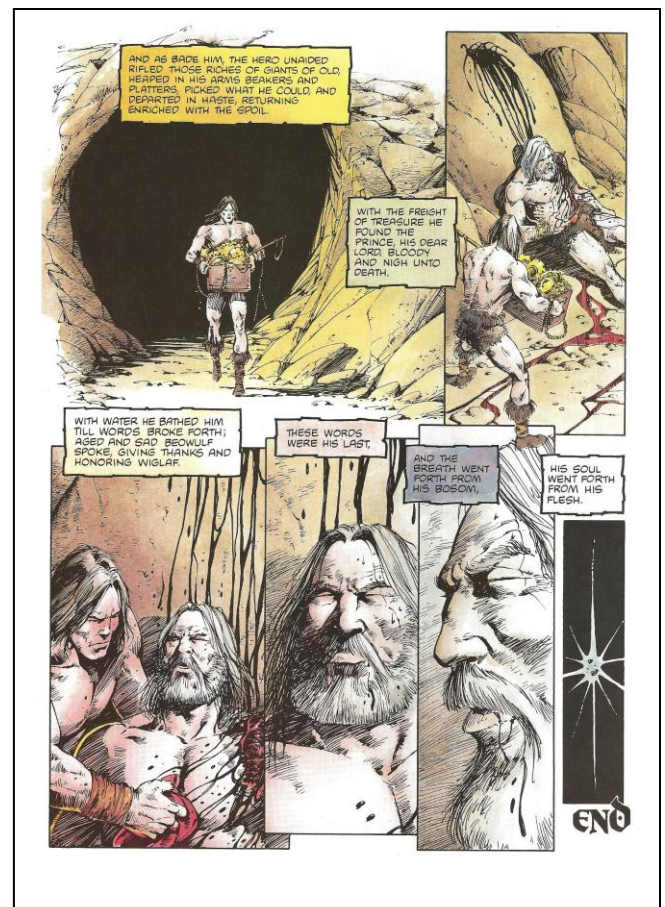
Then Wexstan's son went in, as quickly
 As he could, did as the dying Beowulf
 Asked, entered the inner darkness
 Of the tower, went with his mail shirt and his sword. 2755
 Flushed with victory he groped his way,
 A brave young warrior, and suddenly saw
 Piles of gleaming gold, precious

Gems, scattered on the floor, cups
 And bracelets, rusty old helmets, beautifully 2760
 Made but rotting with no hands to rub
 And polish them. They lay where the dragon left them;
 It had flown in the darkness, once, before fighting
 Its final battle. (So gold can easily
 Triumph, defeat the strongest of men, 2765
 No matter how deep it is hidden!) And he saw,
 Hanging high above, a golden
 Banner, woven by the best of weavers
 And beautiful. And over everything he saw
 A strange light, shining everywhere, 2770
 On walls and floor- and treasure. Nothing
 Moved, no other monsters appeared;
 He took what he wanted, all the treasures
 That pleased his eye, heavy plates
 And golden cups and the glorious banner, 2775
 Loaded his arms with all they could hold.
 Beowulf's dagger, his iron blade,
 Had finished the fire-spitting terror
 That once protected tower and treasures
 Alike; the gray bearded lord of the Geats
 Had ended those flying, burning raids
 Forever. 2780

Then Wiglaf went back, anxious
 TO return while Beowulf was alive, to bring him
 Treasure they'd won together. He ran, 2785
 Hoping his wounded king, weak
 And dying, had not left the world too soon.
 Then he brought their treasure to Beowulf, and found
 His famous king bloody, gasping
 For breath. But Wiglaf sprinkled water 2790
 Over his lord, until the words
 Deep in his breast broke through and were heard.
 Beholding the treasure he spoke, haltingly:

"For this, this gold, these jewels, I thank
 Our Father in Heaven, Ruler of the Earth— 2795
 For all of this, that His grace has given me,
 Allowed me to bring to my people while breath
 Still came to my lips. I sold my life
 For this treasure, and I sold it well. Take
 What I leave, Wiglaf, lead my people, 2800
 Help them; my time is gone. Have
 The brave Geats build me a tomb,
 When the funeral flames have burned me, and build it
 Here, at the water's edge, high
 On this spit of land, so sailors can see 2805
 This tower, and remember my name, and call it
 Beowulf's tower, and boats in the darkness
 And mist, crossing the sea, will know it."

Then that brave king gave the golden
 Necklace from around his throat to Wiglaf, 2810
 Gave him his gold-covered helmet, and his rings,
 And his mail shirt, and ordered him to use them well:
 "You're the last of all our far-flung family.
 Fate has swept our race away,



Taken warriors in their strength and led them 2815
 To the death that was waiting. And now I follow them."
 The old man's mouth was silent, spoke
 No more, had said as much as it could;
 He would sleep in the fire, soon. His soul
 Left his flesh, flew to glory. 2820

Chapter 39

And then Wiglaf was left, a young warrior
 Sadly watching his beloved king,
 Seeing him stretched on the ground, left guarding
 A torn and bloody corpse. But Beowulf's
 Killer was dead, too, the coiled 2825
 Dragon, cut in half, cold
 And motionless: men, and their swords, had swept it
 From the earth, left it lying in front of
 Its tower, won its treasure when it fell
 Crashing to the ground, cut it apart 2830
 With their hammered blades, driven them deep in
 Its belly. It would never fly through the night,
 Glowing in the dark sky, glorying
 In its riches, burning and raiding: two warriors
 Had shown it their strength, slain it with their swords. 2835
 Not many men, no matter how strong,
 No matter how daring, how bold, had done
 As well, rushing at its venomous fangs,
 Or even quietly entering its tower,
 Intending to steal but finding the treasure's 2840
 Guardian awake, watching and ready
 To greet them. Beowulf had gotten its gold,
 Bought it with blood; dragon and king
 Had ended each other's days on earth.

And when the battle was over Beowulf's followers 2845
 Came out of the wood, cowards and traitors,
 Knowing the dragon was dead. Afraid,
 While it spit its fires, to fight in their lord's
 Defense, to throw their javelins and spears,
 They came like shamefaced jackals, their shields 2850
 In their hands, to the place where the prince lay dead,
 And waited for Wiglaf to speak. He was sitting
 Near Beowulf's body, wearily sprinkling
 Water in the dead man's face, trying
 To stir him. He could not. No one could have kept 2855
 Life in their lord's body, or turned
 Aside the Lord's will: world
 And men and all move as He orders,
 And always have, and always will.
 Then Wiglaf turned and angrily told them 2860
 What men without courage must hear.
 Wexstan's brave son stared at the traitors,
 His heart sorrowful, and said what he had to:
 "I say what anyone who speaks the truth
 Must say. Your lord gave you gifts, 2865
 Swords and the armor you stand in now;
 You sat on the mead-hall benches, prince



And followers, and he gave you, with open hands,
Helmets and mail shirts, hunted across
The world for the best of weapons. War 2870
Came and you ran like cowards, dropped
Your swords as soon as the danger was real.
Should Beowulf have boasted of your help, rejoiced
In your loyal strength? With God's good grace
He helped himself, swung his sword 2875
Alone, won his own revenge.
The help I gave him was nothing, but all
I was able to give; I went to him, knowing
That nothing but Beowulf's strength could save us,
And my sword was lucky, found some vital 2880
Place and bled the burning flames
Away. Too few of his warriors remembered.
To come, when our lord faced death, alone.
And now the giving of swords, of golden
Rings and rich estates, is over, 2885
Ended for you and everyone who shares
Your blood: when the brave Geats hear
How you bolted and ran none of your race
Will have anything left but their lives. And death
Would be better for them all, and for you, than the kind 2890
Of life you can lead, branded with disgrace!"

Chapter 42 Beowulf's Wishes Fulfilled

Hiding that treasure deep in its tower,
As the dragon had done, broke God's law
And brought it no good. Guarding its stolen 3060
Wealth it killed Wiglaf's king,
But was punished with death. Who knows when princes
And their soldiers, the bravest and strongest of men,
Are destined to die, their time ended,
Their homes, their halls empty and still? 3065
So Beowulf sought out the dragon, dared it
Into battle, but could never know what God
Had decreed, or that death would come to him, or why.
So the spell was solemnly laid, by men
Long dead; it was meant to last till the day 3070
Of judgment. Whoever stole their jewels,
Their gold, would be cursed with the flames of hell,
Heaped high with sin and guilt, If greed
Was what brought him: God alone could break
Their magic, open His grace to man. 3075
Then Wiglaf spoke, Wexstan's son:
"How often an entire country suffers
On one man's account! That time has come to us:
We tried to counsel our beloved king,
Our shield and protection, show him danger, 3080
Urge him to leave the dragon in the dark
Tower it had lain in so long, lived there
Till the end of the world. Fate, and his will,
Were too strong. Everyone knows the treasure
His life bought: but Beowulf was worth 3085
More than this gold, and the gift is a harsh one.

I've seen it all, been in the tower
Where the jewels and armor were hidden, allowed
To behold them once war and its terror were done.
I gathered them up, gold and silver, 3090
Filled my arms as full as I could
And quickly carried them back to my king.
He lay right here, still alive,
Still sure in mind and tongue. He spoke
Sadly, said I should greet you, asked 3095
That after you'd burned his body you bring
His ashes here, make this the tallest
Of towers- and his tomb—as great and lasting
As his fame, when Beowulf himself walked
The earth and no man living could match him. 3100
Come, let us enter the tower, see
The dragon's marvelous treasure one
Last time: I'll lead the way, take you
Close to that heap of curious jewels,
And rings, and gold. Let the pyre be ready 3105
And high: as soon as we've seen the dragon's
Hoard we will carry our beloved king,
Our leader and lord, where he'll lie forever
In God's keeping."

Then Wiglaf commanded 3110
The wealthiest Geats, brave warriors
And owners of land, leaders of his people,
To bring wood for Beowulf's funeral:
"Now the fire must feed on his body,
Flames grow heavy and black with him 3115
Who endured arrows falling in iron
Showers, feathered shafts, barbed
And sharp; shot through linden shields,
Storms of eager arrowheads dropping."

And Wextan's wise son took seven 3120
Of the noblest Geats, led them together
Down the tunnel, deep into the dragon's
Tower; the one in front had a torch,
Held it high in his hands. The best
Of Beowulf's followers-entered behind 3125
That gleaming flame: seeing gold.
And silver rotting on the ground, with no one
To guard it, the Geats were not troubled with scruples
Or fears, but quickly gathered up
Treasure and carried it out of the tower. 3130
And they rolled the dragon down to the cliff
And dropped it over, let the ocean take it,
The tide sweep it away. Then silver
And gold and precious jewels were put
On a wagon, with Beowulf's body, and brought 3135
Down the jutting sand, where the pyre waited.

Chapter 43 Beowulf's Funeral

A huge heap of wood was ready,
Hung around with helmets, and battle
Shields, and shining mail shirts, all



As Beowulf had asked. The bearers brought	3140
Their beloved lord, their glorious king,	
And weeping laid him high on the wood	
Then the warriors began to kindle that greatest	
Of funeral fires; smoke rose	
Above the flames, black and thick,	3145
And while the wind blew and the fire	
Roared they wept, and Beowulf's body	
Crumbled and was gone. The Geats stayed,	
Moaning their sorrow, lamenting their lord-	
A gnarled old woman, hairwound	3150
Tight and gray on her head, groaned	
A song of misery, of infinite sadness	
And days of mourning, of fear and sorrow	
To come, slaughter and terror and captivity.	
And Heaven swallowed the billowing smoke.	3155
Then the Geats built the tower, as Beowulf	
Had asked, strong and tall, so sailors	
Could find it from far and wide; working	
For ten long days they made his monument,	
Sealed his ashes in walls as straight	3160
And high as wise and willing hands	
Could raise them. And the riches he and Wiglaf	
Had won from the dragon, rings, necklaces,	
Ancient, hammered armor—all	
The treasures they'd taken were left there, too,	3165
Silver and jewels buried in the sandy	
Ground, back in the earth, again	
And forever hidden and useless to men.	
And then twelve of the bravest Geats	
Rode their horses around the tower,	3170
Telling their sorrow, telling stories	
Of their dead king and his greatness, his glory,	
Praising him for heroic deeds, for a life	
As noble as his name. So should all men	
Raise up words for their lords, warm	3175
With love, when their shield and protector leaves	
His body behind, sends his soul	
On high. And so Beowulf's followers	
Rode, mourning their beloved leader,	
Crying that no better king had ever	3180
Lived, no prince so mild, no man	
So open to his people, so deserving of praise.	

THE END