Here is a tale from days gone by—a fine example of ancient creature fiction set within the context of Scandinavian history.

See a graceless monster pit himself against the Danish hall-rulers; a vicious she-wolf wreak vengeance on that people for the death of her child; and an unruly dragon vent his anger on the men of the Geats.

Discover the dangers of taking drink with an enemy; the price to be paid for the slaughter of a kinsman; and the real significance of an avenging sword.

Meet an ambitious young prince who twice marries and twice turns from his wife; find out why a fresh-faced retainer has to fight beyond his measure; and learn how a hero by the name of ‘Bee-Wolf’ wins glory for ages to come.

Parfell Áli og alt hans lid.
Sunt qui asserant morientem
eum soluto in risum ore.

BEOWULF & THE BATTLE-BEASTS OF YORE

Narrated by S. R. Jensen
Illustrated by Derek Allen

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Narrabean, Sydney, 2004
There are those who say that Agnar, in supreme suppression of his pain, gave up the ghost with his lips parted into a smile.

(from the History of the Danes, a thirteenth-century Latin work by Saxo Grammaticus)

Joyful was the valiant Athils when they came east to that place; troops with flashing spears rode quickly forthwith to the battle. No truce gave they to their foes: well they earned their pay. There fell Ali and all his host.

(from the Bjarki-rhymes, a fifteenth-century Icelandic poem of unknown authorship)

A dragon shall abide in the barrow, old, rejoicing in his rich harvest.
'A demon is to dwell in the fen, alone within the land.'
'A warrior must show courage.'

(from the Old English Gnomic Verses, a set of maxims of the eleventh century)
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I must also thank Derek Allen, a young man of great enthusiasm and artistic promise, for providing a visual background to the text in his delightfully unaffected original sketches.

FOREWORD

The tale that follows—which takes its rise from events of the fifth and sixth centuries—passed from Scandinavia into England in the very earliest of times, and there it was recast, and retold in poetic form, in the Anglo-Saxon (or 'Old English') tongue. Here, it is brought forth anew, in Modern English prose and in somewhat different array, in order that today's reader may—by learning something of the thought, culture and etiquette of the age which produced it—discover the meaning behind its words.

Central to the story are the deeds of the adventurer known to English speakers as 'Beowulf', a champion who begins his career in the service of the Danish king, fighting against a monster and his mother, and ends it as the ruler of Geatland, caught up in a feud with a dragon. Yet the recitation is not simply one of bear-warriors and uncanny catiffs; it also details past struggles between the Danes and the Geats and the marauding Swedes. Indeed, it is the studied combination of fiction and of fact which gives the narration its air of intrigue.

Thus, we find an overlap between villain and monster (in that human malefactors behave like brutes, and savage beasts are capable of feeling as men do); a created confusion over the true nature of the battle (whether it be a simple hand-to-hand meeting, or a full-scale clash of armies); a retelling, in variant guises, of certain episodes (such as the fight between Bjarki and Agnar, the feast at which the old trooper calls to mind past slaughters, and the expedition launched against the dragon); and a strategic placement of seemingly disparate matter (as when Beowulf gives notice of Ingeld's betrothal to
Freawaru, almost immediately after being asked to provide an account of his activities in Denmark).

We are aware of a need to breathe vengeance on the enemy (which means that our Geatish hero has to settle disputes not only with a pretender and a king, but also with a number of other shady characters); a particular importance assigned to individual swords (whereby blades belonging to identified, or identifiable, parties are used to dispatch the various misshapen rogues); and an occasional lack of chronological specificity (so that, for example, the character called 'Grendel' comes of age well-nigh imperceptibly, at some indeterminate time before he first attacks the Danish kingdom; Agnar makes his raids against the Danes all but unseen, at intervals throughout the reign of Hrothgar; and Beowulf seems to pass from prince and monster-slayer to king and defender-of-the-realm in the twinkling of an eye, albeit that events of the gravest consequence to the security of the nation are happening at the very same time as he is demonstrating his capacity to take the title).

We come upon an uncertain geography (in which the mead-hall is presented as the head-quarters of the civilised world and the surrounding wasteland as the haunt of every imaginable breed of demon); an abundance of attacks on lawful rulers (made by overseas leaders, local princes, and those living on the borders of the land); an emphasis on the loyalty properly owed by a liegeman to his lord (with the result that, during the dragon-fight, Wiglaf supports the Geatish king quite beyond what is expected of him as the son of a Swedish nobleman, given that the Geats are engaged at the time in a quarrel with the Swedes); and a foregrounding of the suffering of women (so, for example, that Ingeld's Swedish wife necessarily experiences a loss of fortune when she is divorced by her murdering husband, and Grendel's mother faces a veritable sea of troubles when 'Cain' is exiled for the sword-slaying of his half-brother, 'Abel').

And we see the identification of the more prominent characters by way of their appellations (as is brought to our attention, for instance, in the cases of the Beowulf, Grendel and Cain), but a failure to remark on other players (most obviously, perhaps, when the daughter of Swerting is left unnamed, the Geatish wife of Ongentheow appears but fleetingly, and the presence of Beowulf's sister is no more than implied, even though all three women have important secondary roles in the narrative); and an apparently deliberate withholding of information (inasmuch as the background to the fall of Ingeld's princely son and the name of the particular man killed by the dragon are not supplied).

In short, the account shows an extended interplay between plain-speaking and make-believe. Nonetheless, a careful and reasoned evaluation of its workings will allow us to draw the bitter and bloody-minded murderers out of their dark mansions and bring them forth into the bright-shining light of the day.
The mighty Swedes come across the southern seas, and over the frozen northern lakes, to make war on their enemies. The Geats—who are allied with the Danes at the time of this tale—fight against them (and against Grendel and his mother and the Dragon) as a people in their own right. It is only later that their holdings become part of the wider Swedish domain.

NOTES TO THE READER

- The pronunciation of the Anglo-Saxon consonants is much like that of their Modern English counterparts, but some specific differences of spelling include: sc for the sound sh (as in Scéf-ing and Asc-her); cg for dg (as in Ecgle-wyt); y (at times) for oo (as in Hyme-lac and Wyphings); and g (occasionally) for the sound i (as in thegn).

  The letter h may be pronounced in a number of ways: at the beginning of a word, just as h (as in Healf-dene); in the middle of a word, rather like a k (as in Wooh-stan and the first syllable of Oht-her); and, at the end of a word, like a soft g (as in burh). The combination hr, however, represents a rather weakly-spoken h plus a normal r, as in Hroth-gar and Hrunt-ing. (These days, it would be written simply as r.)

- The distinction between the Old and the Modern English vowels and diphthongs is negligible and, even though the spellings may not always coincide, the meaning can sometimes be determined from the context. Thus, Healf-dene, son of a Danish king and a Swedish woman, is quite literally a ‘Half Dane’; the Danish hall, Heorot, is adorned with the horns of the male deer, or ‘Hart’; the Weders are the ‘Weather’ Geats; and Bee-wulfl is a ‘Bee-Wolf’ or, in other words, a bear.

- Scandinavian consonantal usage may or may not overlap with that of the Old English. For example: the runic characters ð and þ (both pronounced as th) come into English either as a th sound (as in līth and therw), or as a d (as is shown by comparing the modern Scandinavian word Athils with
the English one *Ead-gils*), while the letter *j* (as in *Bjarki* and *fjorundus*) represents our *i*. Scandanavian vowel-sounds are, however, fairly similar to ours (as in the word *Góteborg*, which we would describe as being the ‘burh’, or town, of the ‘Geats’).

- The early forms of personal names are retained, so that the original meanings will not be obliterated. Particular usages need, therefore, to be explained.

Certain characters are named by conventional means. Hence, the first-mentioned Dane-king, *Scyld* or ‘Shield’, is identified as *Seof-ing*, or the ‘son-of-Seof’; the *Scyld-ings* (or Danish people) are, by analogy, recognisable as the ‘descendants-of-Scyld’; and the Swedish earl, *Sweert-ing*, is seemingly depicted, by association with the word *sweart*, as the ‘son-of-the-Black(hearted)-One’.

Some personages, on the other hand, are defined by the roles that they play. So, in the Danish segment, the very forthright warrior, *Stark-ath*, inasmuch as he will accept no terms, is characterised as being ‘Stark’ (or perhaps ‘Stout’) of ‘Heart’; the Danish king, *Hroth-gar*, having made himself overlord of the tribes by his military skill, is called a ‘Glorious’ Spear(fighter); the monster, *Grendel*, in being compared to another character in the story, is likely put forward as one who is ‘Grin-Deal(t)’ or ‘Grin-Divid(ed)’; Beowulf’s father, *Ecg-theow*, after having sworn allegiance to Hrothgar, is said to be an ‘Edge’- or ‘Sword-Servant’; the vexatious retainer, *Un-fearth*, in that he creates trouble for Beowulf at the Danish court, is labelled as ‘Un-Peace’; the mighty warrior, *Asc-here*, as the first of the fighters to meet with Grendel’s mother, is given a name which means ‘Army-of-Ash(en Spears)’; and Hrothgar’s daughter, *Frea-warn*, on her betrothal to the scheming and untrustyworthly Ingeld, is drawn as a girl who is ‘Lord-Wary’.

And, in the Geatish section, *Hrehel*, king of the Geats, is named the ‘Triumphant One’, since he has defended his country against all comers; *Hath-cyn*, his son, is revealed as a ‘Warlike Kinsman’, because he has slain a brother through the hostility of his heart; *Wig-laf*, the nephew of Beowulf, is described as a ‘War-Leaving’, for he is the only (royal) Geat to survive the Swedish wars; *Hyge-lac*, beloved uncle to Beowulf, is held to be the hero’s own ‘Heart’s Gift’; and *Ongent-theow*, aged leader of the Swedes, is identified as one who (in an earlier story) has fought ‘Against-the-Servant’.

- A number of individuals are presented in an intentionally roundabout way. Thus, when Ingeld is about to marry for the second time, he is described as the ‘son of Froda’, which calls to mind his manoeuvrings after the murder of his father, and suggests that his intentions are not now as noble as they might be. Then, as Wiglaf makes ready to go in under the roof of the dragon’s treasure-house, he is referred to rather obliquely as ‘Weohstan’s son’, and this helps to emphasise the nature of the particular edifice by reminding us of his father’s former alliances with the Swedes. And, when it is said that Ongentheow takes the life of Ialchyn ‘Hrethling’ and rescues his noble Geatish wife-of-former-years, ‘Onela’s mother and Othhere’s’, we are made aware of the erstwhile marriage-agreement between Ongentheow and the sister of Hrehel, and so of the reasons for the attacks subsequently made on the Geats (and indeed on the son of Hrehel) by the Swedish king and his two sons.

- Two characters, Cain and Abel, though called after the biblical ones, are nonetheless to be read according to the story at hand—in just the same way as the ‘Origin of Men’ is to be understood as the establishment of the Danish race, the ‘sea-flood’ as a torrent sent by God to destroy the sinners of the Scandinavian world, and the ‘Fall’ as the
collapse of a family of anti-Danish monsters.

- The rather complicated ties of kinship and marriage are shown in the Genealogies. Members of the male line are often given names which begin with the same letter, or else with one of the five vowel-sounds, but similar identifying principles are not applied to women.

- Footnotes are provided as an aid to the reader. They are especially useful in the final parts of the work where, for example, the detailed but non-consecutive account of the different generations of warring Swedes can be both cryptic and confusing.

- Definitions of unusual terms are given in the Glossary at the end of the book, and should be examined carefully, since the sense of the story frequently hinges on an earlier, or perhaps unseen, meaning of a word.

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**THE MAIN PLAYERS IN THE SUCCESSION GAME**

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<tr>
<th>DANES</th>
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<td>?</td>
<td>Aun</td>
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<td>Hrothgar Agnar</td>
<td>Heardred Beowulf</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
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<td>Daughter</td>
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<td>Wiglaf</td>
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The crown goes by right to the first son of a king, and then to each of the sons of the first son in turn, before it goes to the second son—and a child born of a lawful union will normally inherit the kingdom, unless it is already held by someone much more accomplished in war. Daughters, of course, have no claim on the throne, and neither do the sons of daughters, unless there is no-one in line before them who is strong enough to assume command. This general lack of
opportunity leads some lesser princes to murder their kinsmen in order to obtain the rule, while others choose simply to increase their influence (and so their war-power) by marrying into foreign families. The women involved are not overly noteworthy, but their presence in the story nonetheless proclaims an intended peace between the nations. And yet such matches are doomed from the start—because of longstanding differences among the peoples, because of the need to avenge kinsfolk slain in previous wars and, most of all, because of the willingness of the husband to take his opportunities as they arise.

THE POLITICS OF THE DANISH CHIEFTAINCY

Healfdene
(by the daughter of Jorundus of Sweden)

Hrothgar

Hrothulf
(by: Ingeld)

Ingeld
(by a Danishwoman)

Agnar
(by the daughter of Earl Swerting)

Ingeld, Froda’s second son, marries twice: in the first instance to the daughter of the very powerful Swedish earl, Swerting, and in the second to a Danish princess, the child of his own nephew, Hrothgar. Each of the women is offered to him as compensation for the slaughter of a kinsman: the one for the outright murder of his father by Swerting, and the other for the death-in-battle of his son, Agnar, at the hands of the Danes. (Both bring him great might but both, also, are cast
aside by him when the occasion demands.) And though he
exacts the required vengeance—firstly by slaying the sons
of Swerting, and latterly by making war on Hrothgar—it is
clear from his every act that he is not honourable. In fact,
between times he does away with his elder brother, Healfdene,
in order that he may have the whole of Denmark to himself.
The attempt, however, is unsuccessful, and he is sent out into
exile—and possibly back into Sweden. (Yet, without the
support of his wife, Ingeld has no access to the troops fed by
her dead father's earldom and, without the backing of Ingeld,
Agnar has no legitimate claim upon the Danish regality.)

When Hygelac of the Geats is killed in battle, his widow
offers the sceptre to Beowulf, because she fears that her son,
Heardred, lacks the strength to keep the country safe from
outside attack. But Beowulf, who is merely the son of a
princess, refuses to take the helm ahead of his young cousin,
and acts instead as his guardian until he comes of age. In
behaving so, he is unlike both his uncle, Hathcyn—one who
shoots down his older brother so as to be king—and the Swedish prince, Onela, the second son of Ongentheow and of Beowulf's grandaunt—a man who, on the death of his brother, Othhere, drives away his two nephews, Eanmund and Eadgils, and seizes the crown for himself. It is Onela, said to be the mightiest of gift-givers in the land of Sweden, who eventually allows Beowulf to have the Geatish throne—for, although he himself probably has a better claim to it than does the child of his female cousin, the apparent physical distance between his realm and the lesser one means that he cannot hope to rule the Geats in person. (His court is thought to have been at Uppsala, and the other in or around the area of Göteborg.)

Hrethel's sister marries Ongentheow, king of the Swedes—but war later breaks out between the two forces. The struggle goes on for many years, with each party attempting to have possession of the Geatish woman, and so (it would seem) confirm or deny the rights of her sons to the kingship of the Geats. Meanwhile, back in Sweden, Othhere dies, and Onela grabs the regency from his two young nephews, Eanmund and Eadgils, both of whom are in line for the succession before him. Then, when Heardred of Geatland grants the boys refuge—and probably military assistance as well—Onela brings an army against him and kills him. (At around the same time, and probably during the very same battle, Eanmund is slain by the Swedish earl, Weohstan.) And although Beowulf does then accept the offer of the local kingdom—and undoubtedly swears oaths to the Swedes as a matter of necessity—he later makes an expedition against Onela, and deprives him of his life. (As next-of-kin, it is Beowulf's duty to seek blood for the murder of his cousin, Heardred.) He loses his life in a fight with a dragon and, on
his death, the land of the Geats is incorporate province of Sweden. (He kills his wormish foe assistance of Wiglaf, who is the son of his sist Weohstan.)

Part I: The Kings of the Danes

Behold, we have heard of the glory of the Spear-Danes, the rulers of the nation in days of yore—how those princes performed courageous deeds. Many a time Scyld Sceafing deprived enemy tribes of their mead-halls, struck terror into his foes, grew in honours, until each one of those who dwelled around him over the whale’s road had to pay him tribute. He guarded the boundaries of the realm, gave his name to the Danish line of kings.

Afterwards a child was born to him, sent by God as a comfort to the people: He had recognised the cruel distress that they had previously suffered when leaderless. The boy was well known—his fame spread wide in Scylding lands. So must a wight, whilst still under the governance of his father, weave good works, give rich gifts, so that when he is of age, his companions will willingly assist him in times of strife. In every region, near or far, it is by right-minded acts that a man shall prosper. By wickedness will be won a place in Hell. 1

At his destined time, Scyld passed away into the keeping of the Lord. His retainers carried him to the sea-shore—as he had earlier instructed them when he had ruled over them with

1 The Heavenly Father controls all things, from the outcome of battles to the punishment of evil-doers—and those who would rebel against the Order of Things offend against the Lord Himself. The right to rule is God-given, and sinners—be they ever so strong and ferocious—cannot keep hold of a principality which is not theirs by prescription.
words. (Full many a year had he held power in the fortress of the land-folk.)

There in the harbour's icy waters stood the ring-prowed craft, ready to go forth on its journey. They laid their revered leader in the bosom of the burial-ship, majestic by the mast; loaded it with jewels and with weapons of war. On his breast they placed rich dressings, battle-garments from far-flung spheres, treasures which were to go far out with him into the force of the flood. Never was there a keel so splendidly decked out! Their hearts were sad, their mood mournful. They raised a golden banner, high above his head; they let the waves take him. Men cannot say for sure, neither councillors in the hall nor warriors under the heavens, who received that cargo.²

After Scyld had departed this world, Froda was known throughout the middle-earth—a leader of great gallantry, a man not given to weakness of heart. Staunch in the struggle, he defeated a villainous dragon, fork-tongued guardian of a neighbouring treasure-pile; ran the worm through with his sword; took back to his homeland a vessel filled with rich booty; brought about by his own daring that he might enjoy the hoard of rings as he thought fit.

² Other ways of disposing of the dead included inhumation and cremation, followed by the erection of an earthen mound as a monument to the deceased. Any items placed with the body—either in ship or in barrow—were intended for use in the next life. Early heroes believed that they would travel, after dying, to Valhalla, an idyllic Otherworld where they could indulge in warfare every day and feasting every night. The notion of a Christian Afterlife was a later development.

Like his father before him, he maintained the royal court, attracted bold champions there, men giant-like in their strength; set Starkath over them as troop-master, won many a pitched battle in distant parts. He conquered Jorundus, king of the southern Swedes, and his countryman, Earl Swerting, forced them to pay tribute; carried off the daughter of the foreign monarch and begat on her the celebrated Healfdene. But some years later he married a Danish woman, and had a second son, Ingeld, as his legitimate heir.

Now, in these after-times, Swerting sought to relieve his compatriots of the burdensome levies lying hard and unceasing upon them. Hiding a devious intention behind a false show of fidelity, he evolved a plan to kill King Froda—to surprise him under the pretence of a peaceable visit and burn him to death inside his own hall. But the fruits of crime are fleeting, and guilt will always come home to its author. And so it happened to Swerting, for Froda anticipated the trick and put an end to his treacherous hall-guest afore—although the Danish king died soon afterwards of the wounds given him by the earl. He was succeeded in Denmark by his firstling, Healfdene, a prince much practised in deeds of arms.

Healfdene, fierce and foremost in the fighting, held—while he lived—the sovereignty of the noble Scyldings. To him, the leader of the armies, were born, all counted, three sons and one daughter: Heorogar, Hrothgar, Halga, and Urse. But the soul of Ingeld was perverted from honour. Froda's younger son trained himself neither to soldiering nor to war, dulled the bright memories of his ancestors by his dishonourable doings, cramped his glutinous belly with rich and savoury foodstuffs, abandoned himself to wantonness—heaved not one sigh of bitterness for the grievous murder of his kinsman.

The sons of Swerting, fearing they would have to pay the
penalty of their father’s crime, sought to stay Ingeld’s hand by a gift—promised him their sister in marriage. Thus, far from wreaking vengeance for the death of his paternal relation, he bestowed on the butcher’s kindred the utmost courtesy and attention, formed an unnatural union with strangers, held at no account the dignity of his illustrious sire.  

In the evening, Ingeld and his wife took their meal in the beer-hall with the sons of the smiter, sat down to a magnificent feast, an unbridled array of exotic dishes, sumptuous spiced meats. But Starkath, glorious old spear-fighter that he was, declared himself ill-disposed towards such licentious indulgence. Remembering the indissoluble ties of friendship which had bound him to Froda, he rejected the foreign delicacies, chose old-fashioned plainness before high-seasoned Swedish dainties, declined to take food or drink with those who insulted the memory of his kind and bountiful leader, contented himself with some smoky and rather rancid fare.  

Seeing him so stiff-necked and contrary to the settlement, and thinking somehow to buy his favour, Ingeld’s young bride took from her hair a band of the most marvellous handiwork, cleverly ‘twined with gold, and put it into his lap as he supped. But he flung the pretty ornament back in the face of the giver, saying that in such an offering there was more scorn than respect, and that the head-piece of a wench ought never to adorn the locks of a warrior.  

The girl held, nonetheless, to her purpose: she bade a minstrel strike up a melody, intending to melt the old man’s rage by means of cunning sounds and flattering words. Starkath, however, turned a deaf ear to the strains of the flute. With his face set in stubborn indignation, the grizzled old gladiator hurled a bone, which he had stripped of its meat in the eating of it, at the brain-pan of the chirruping bard, driving the wind out of his puffed cheeks; gave him a shankbone on which to pipe; showed that a greater debt was owed to the sacred dust of his mighty friend, Froda, than to his corrupt and degenerate offspring. He said that it was shameful to requite wrongs with kindness; bent himself to the purpose of revenge; determined that Ingeld should put to death those he had, thus far, let go scot free.  

The distinguished champion, vexed with stinging wrath at so disgraceful a compromise, composed his own song as a flout to the fifer, held forth after this very manner: “Thou, Ingeld, buried in sin, why dost thou tarry in the task of avenging thy father? Is the slaughter of a sire such a little thing to thee? Whilst thou delightest to honour thy bride, laden with gems and shining in gold apparel, I burn with restless resentment, lamenting the ignominy of thy deeds.  

“Why hast thou accepted ransom for the loss of a relative, taken payment for the murder of a parent? By thy bargain thou utterly unnervest the warrior in thee. Go where thou mayest—East, West, to the mid-most place of the earth, or to the cold quarter of the heavens where the Pole Star is to be seen—shame shall accompany thee far. Never canst thou be counted amongst the ranks of the famous. Fearing that thy cupidity shall be known, thou shalt lie skulking in a corner of the country, soul-less in thy shadowy den, not fit to be accepted
into the society of honourable men.

"I came here, swift and headlong, to sharpen thy senses to a point. By no means will I indulge in glutinous feasting—or suffer the piled-up treasures of my beloved Froda to go to the profit of strangers. These barking brutes pay thee homage in show only. Rise up, Ingeld, and put an end to this infamy! Do thou, too—if thou hast any wit—flee thy savage consort, lest the she-wolf bring forth a litter like herself, and a beast spring from thee that shall hurt its own father!"

Such stirring eloquence, vigorous pleading, drew out Ingeld's courage from the deepest recesses of its exile: the bosom formerly cold and uncaring conceived a blazing fire of resolve, and the reveller changed then into the foeman. The young prince leapt up and poured out his anger on those at the table, unsheathed his sword against the sons of Swerting, aimed with drawn blade at the throats of those he had formerly shown the warmth of his embrace—severed thus the feeble bonds of their fellowship, steeped the cups in blood rather than in wine.4

He ordered the corpses of his foes to be scattered in the nearby fields, quite justly denied them the privilege of funeral, pyre or mound; let them taint the country all about with their deadly corruption, a banquet of bodies for the beaks of birds, a rotting repast for the ravening wolf. And so the vilest slave of excess became the most bloodthirsty agent of retribution.

4 The dead man's next-of-kin should exact vengeance immediately—on the murderer himself or, if he is already dead, on his closest surviving family-member. Yet Ingeld only bestirs himself when he realises that the rights to the kingdom and treasury of his own nation may eventually pass into the hands of those savage and unscrupulous outlanders with whom he has recently become involved. (And although he has a change of heart towards his wife very soon after the attack, he does not—ultimately—lose all of his Swedish man-power. Alliances change back, and back again, as the need arises.)

He then put aside Swerting's daughter, divested her of her new-found privileges, went back once more to the provinces of the fatherland. Antiquity relates that the repudiated wife afterwards bore him a son, Agnar.

Yet the valour of Ingeld was short-lived. In his eagerness to rule alone, he came upon his elder brother, Healfdene, unawares with an army, and slew him—claiming that he, born of a woman taken in war, was unworthy of having the Danish inheritance. For this unnatural crime, he was driven into exile, forced to fly as an outlaw to unknown quarters, a man steeped in his own iniquity, despised in the eyes of the Lord. He inhabited the wasteland according to the pre-determined course of things, came to be as one with every dark and dis-courteous demon known to Mankind. 5 And so the sons of Healfdene began to rule in Denmark one after the other, carried in their consciousness the memory of their father's murder—while Ingeld, with gathering hatred in his heart, sought a way to regain the heritage lost.

5 Agnar—who is first cousin to Hrothgar—loses his royal birthright when his father disowns his mother, but many years later he brings his own legions against the Danes—seemingly after having joined forces with his estranged sire once more. Before the reunion he is seen as a blackguard by association, after it as a traitor by design. We learn from another source that he is killed in the battle—by the warrior known, to Scandinavians, as 'Bothvar Bjarki' ('Warlike Little Bear').
Part II: Grendel

Now, Heorogar was hailed as king of the Scyldings after his father’s demise, but met with an untimely death at the hands of his foes. Then, to Hrothgar, was granted success in battle, honour in war, so that his retainers eagerly followed him—until the fledgling troop grew into a mighty band of warriors. It came into his mind that he would have a mead-house built, greater than the Sons of Men had ever heard of, and within it he would deal out, to young and old, all such things as God had given him. Orders were given to the many tribes of the middle-earth to adorn the palace of the people.

In time it was ready, the most famous of fold-buildings. He who had power far and wide created for it the name ‘Heorot’, distributed rings and treasure at the banquet, just as he had vowed. The hall stood high and horn-gabled, awaited the hostile flames: it would not be long before the sword-hatred would rise up between the son- and the father-in-law. 6

Then the bold being—insatiable heathen haunter—suffered uneasily the time, in that every day he heard rejoicing, loud in

6 Heorot will be destroyed by fire in a hateful encounter between Ingeld and Hrothgar. Ingeld will marry Hrothgar’s daughter, Freawaru, in an attempt at a first peace, but the treaty will not last, and he will then try to take the kingdom ahead of others who have more right to it: the king’s two young sons, his brother, Hulfa; and his nephew, Hrothulf. His branch of the family will by then be termed ‘War-Bards’—perhaps because of the links he has established (and re-established) with the very fierceious Swedes. (For now, though, he will remain out of sight.)
the hall. There was the sound of the harp, the sweet song of
the poet—he who knew how to relate the Origin of Men in
olden times said that the Almighty fashioned the earth, a
bright plain surrounded by water, set up the sun and moon to
shine as light for the land-dwellers, adorned the corners of
the world with branches and leaves, and also gave life to each
thing that moves about.

So the princely men lived in joy—until that fiend from
Hell began to perform misdeeds. The grim ghostly one was
called 'Grendel'—a notorious march-stepper, who held the
moors, the fen, and the fastness. The unhappy soul continued,
for a time, in the homeland of the monster-race, after the
Creator had condemned him as being of the kin of Cain. The
Eternal Lord avenged that slaying, of Abel: indeed, the
murderer did not prosper from the feud, but the Provider
drove him far from Mankind for his crime. From 'Cain' were
born all evil ones—giants and elves and unclean spirits. Verily
shall the sins of the fathers be visited upon the sons.

Then, after the shades of evening had fallen, Grendel went
to seek out the noble domicile, Heorot, to determine how the
Ring-Danes had settled into it after the beer-drinking. Inside
he found a company of kinsfolk, sleeping after the banquet,
unaware of the misery in store for them. The unholy creature,
gaunt and greedy, cruel and savage, was soon ready, and
seized thirty sleeping thegnis.7 From there he turned back,
exulting in his booty, to go to his home, take path to his

hiding-place with that heap of slaughter. The next night he
again committed more murderous acts, and felt no remorse
for them at all, for he was too intent on his wicked course.
Then it was easy to find a man who sought rest elsewhere, a
bed amongst the outbuildings, once the hatred of this hall-thegn
was pointed out to him. And thus Grendel strove against
right, one against all, until the best of houses stood idle.

It was a great while, the space of twelve winters, that the
Scyldings endured such woes and sorrows. Therefore it became
known far and wide, sung in songs, that Grendel had long
contended with Hrothgar, had carried on a furious quarrel
over many a season. He would have no friendship with any of
the Danes, would not withdraw his hostilities or pay a life-fee.
But the demon, dole-some death-shadow, went on persecuting
warriors both young and old, roamed the misty moors in the
perpetual darkness.

Thus he, the Enemy of Mankind, the terrible solitary one,
often committed many a crime. He took up residence in the
treasure-decked hall in the swart nights, but could not come
near to the gift-stol on account of God the Ordainer, the
Mighty Judge of Deeds. And thus Hrothgar, son of Healfdene,
brooded on his adversity, but was not able to turn aside from
his troubles: that struggle was too harsh, loathsome
and long-lasting.8

From his home, a good man among the Geats, a thegn of
Hygelac, learned of Grendel's lawless labours. He was the
most excellent of fighters living in that day and age, strong-

7 The shameless bandit, Grendel, lives on the outskirts of the kingdom, is
upset by the singing of the Creation Song in the ample Danish ale-house, and
is the adversary of both God and Man. He cannot advance towards Hrothgar's
throne but, as we shall see, he does station himself in the hall of a night.
And he eats his victims alive, thirty at a time. However, the kinsmen of those
slain may not expect to receive any reparation for their loss: he craves
carnage not conciliation.

8 Heorot is a towering and wide-roofed fortress, the glittering central court
of the entire kingdom of Denmark, and Hrothgar is the ruler of several other
tribes. But the combined strength of the Scyldings is gradually decreasing as
each of their men is devoured by the desperado, leaving the Danish warlord
in urgent need of soldiers from across the sea—mercenaries who are looking
for fame and fortune in distant lands.
armed and mettlesome. He ordered a sturdy sea-going ship to be prepared, said that he would seek out the worshipful King Hrothgar over the swan-road, since that king was in want of warriors. Wise men tried to dissuade him from that venture not at all, even though he was dear to them; instead they urged him on, examined the omens.

The great one had chosen champions from among the Geats, the bravest that he might find: he went as one of a group of fifteen to the spot where the timbered craft lay waiting. Eagerly the heroes went on board, bore their burnished battle-gear into the bosom of the boat, shoved it out on its course. Driven onwards by the wind, the vessel with its curved prow travelled over the waves of the flood, floating just like a bird—until on the following day the voyagers saw the shining cliffs and wide headlands of Denmark. The ocean was crossed; their expedition was at an end. They moored the sea-wood, and stepped a-ground. They thanked God that their passage had been easy.9

Then the Scylding watchman, he who was engaged in protecting the rampart, saw bright shields, ready war-gear carried over the gang-plank. Wishing to know who these mariners were, he went on horseback to the strand, brandishing his mighty spear, and speaking these words of challenge: “What manner of men are you who thus come bearing weapons to this locality? I am the warden of the shore, appointed to keep a look out over the water, so that no enemy might attack the land of the Danes with a ship-army. You have no knowledge of the set password—I must know your origin before you go further from here as spies into Danish country. Now, you visitors from afar, take good heed of what I say, you had better quickly make known to me the place you have come from.”

The leader of the troop answered him, unlocked his store of words: “We are men of the Geatish race, the companions of Hygelac’s hearth. My father was well known amongst the peoples, a fighter of the most measure, by the name of Ecgtheow. We have come with honourable intent to seek out your sovereign, the stout-hearted son of Healfdene: we have urgent business with the king of the Danes. You will know—if what we have heard say is true—that some kind of ravager (I know not what) causes havoc amongst the Scyldings in the dark of night. I can advise Hrothgar how he might overcome the godless rogue. Otherwise, he will ever afterwards suffer distress—as long as this most glorious of houses remains in its lofty position.”

The coastguard then granted them passage, offering to guide them part-way to Hrothgar’s high-settle. (He instructed a young theng to look after the valorous hero’s ship, preserve it against enemies, until such time as he should return with his men.) They went together, hastening onwards until they could make out the timbered hall, splendid and adorned with gold. Of all the buildings under the skies this one, in which the mighty ruler dwelt, was the most magnificent: its light shone over many lands. The border-defender pointed the bright bastion out to them so that they might go straight to it, then turned his horse back towards the sea to keep watch against hostile forces.

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9 It is only a short day’s journey from Göteborg to Heorot—and an even shorter one from the part of Sweden which lies across the water from the Danish hall. And the doughty Geatish sea-farer brings himself and fourteen other men against Grendel—but later promises to lead a thousand warriors against any other party who should happen to be laying his neighbours under siege.
Part III: Beowulf

The campaigners continued onwards to the hall, their war-bynies sparkling, the ring-iron on their armour singing. They laid their linds against the wall of the building, stood their javelins all together. A proud Danish warrior questioned them further: "Whence do you bring these decorated shields, grey shirts of mail and visored helmets, this heap of battle-shafts?"

The glorious commander of the Geatish crew answered him: "We are the attendants of Hygelac’s household—Beowulf is my name. I wish to tell the reason for my coming to the son of Healfdene, if he will grant us that we may approach him."

The messenger passed on the request to the Danish king, asking him to exchange words with the men of the Weder-Geats, and with their noble leader, Beowulf. Hrothgar, helm of the Scyldings, spoke. "I knew him as a boy. His father was called 'Ecgtheow'; his mother was the only daughter of Hrethel, the mighty over-ruler of the Geats. Sea-farers who have journeyed to Geatland say that he has the strength of

10 The name 'Bee-Wolf' means 'Bear', for certain ferocious warriors were once said, by the race of the English, to take on the characteristics of wild animals—while in Scandinavia, fierce fighters were often called 'ber-sarkers', that is to say, those who wore 'bear-sarks'. Indeed, in one version of the Bjarki-tale—that found in the Bjarki-rhymes—just as he is in the process of battling with Agnar, the hero turns for a time into a white bear—even though he then resumes his human shape and slays his opponent with his sword. But in our account, as we shall soon discover, it is Agnar who is the berserker—and one who acts out his role in the more general sense of the word. There are, to be sure, many ways of presenting a story.
thirty thegns in his hand. Holy God has sent him to us, the West-Danes—or so I hope—against the terror of Grendel. I shall offer him treasures for his courage. Hurry, ask those ship-men to come in. Say to them that they are most welcome to the citizens of this settle-ment.”

The Danish officer bade them enter—instructing them to leave their swords and spears outside. Beowulf advanced, then, until he stood at the hearth of Hrothgar, his mail-coat shining—an armour-net firm and unyielding, put together with all of the ingenuity of the smith. He spoke the following words. “Hail to you, Hrothgar. I am kinsman and young retainer of Hygelac. I have performed many audacious deeds in my time. The Grendel-affair became known to me in my native land; indeed, sea-voyagers say that this, the best of halls, stands empty and useless to all, after the sun’s light is hidden for the evening. The councillors of my people advised me that I should seek you out, because they knew the extent of my might: they themselves looked on as I returned from the strife in which I slew a race of giants, and killed water-monsters in the waves by night, thereby avenging wrongs against the Weders.

“And now I shall resolve the matter with that demon, Grendel. Therefore I ask you not to refuse my request—that I alone and my band of supporters might liberate Heorot. I have heard that the degenerate cares nothing for weapons, and so then I scorn to bear either sword or broad shield into the fray, but vow to take on the enemy with my bare hands, and fight with him to the death, one foe against the other. The Lord will decide who is to win. Fate goes ever as it must.”

Hrothgar spoke, protector of the Scyldings: “You, my friend Beowulf, have sought us out through your own kindness and through your sense of duty. Your spirited father, Ecgtheow, brought about the greatest of feuds when he slew Heatholaf among the Wylfings—and thus the people of the Weders could not keep him for fear of war. He sought out the folk of the South-Danes. (It was at the time that I first ruled the nation. By that time Hrothgar was dead, my elder brother: he was better than I.) I settled the account with a fee, sent ancient treasures to the Wylfings over the ridges of the waves. He swore oaths to me.

“It distresses me to tell what humiliations Grendel has wrought against me with his hatred. My hall-troop, the array of shieldsmen, is shrunken, withering warfare has taken them away. Very often warriors, emboldened by beer, boasted over the ale-cups that they would await Grendel’s onslaught with fearsome edges. But then, at morning-time, when daylight shone forth, was this splendid mead-hall stained end-to-end with battle-gore, every bench-board drenched with blood. I had the fewer of trusty companions then, for death had carried them off. Now, though, you must sit down to the banquet, and speak of victory to the men, as the urge takes you.”

Then a table was cleared in the beer-hall for the Geatish host. A thegn poured out drink for them. Sometimes a minstrel sang, clear-voiced in Heorot. The Danes and the Weder-Geats rejoiced, no small gathering of guardsmen. Nevertheless, Unferth, the son of Ecgtheow, spoke to the lith-man with hostility: he did not want any wight to work more valiant acts than he.

“Are you that Beowulf who competed with Breca in a swimming contest, both of you foolishly risking your lives for a boast? Each of you embraced the tides with your arms, gliding over the winter swell of the ocean, toiling in the power of the water for the space of seven nights. But he reached his destination first, and so made good his promise to you. He beat you in the encounter, had the more skill. Therefore, will
not Grendel also prove too much for you, if you should dare to wait here for him all this night long?"  

Beowulf spoke: "Well, Unferth, my friend, I shall tell you. As boys, Breca and I vowed that we would find fame on the high seas—and so we did. We each took a naked sword in our hands, intending to defend ourselves against whales. Yet in no way could he float far from me across the billowing flood—and I would not go from him. We stayed together for the space of five days until the surging waves drove us apart; the coldest of weathers, the darkening night and the hostile north wind turned against us.

"The waters were troubled, the minds of the sea-fish aroused. My body-sark, hard and hand-woven, helped me against those enemies. One of the spiteful scathers dragged me down to the ocean bed, but I slew that mighty beast with my war-sword. I was frequently assailed by other loathsome creatures as well. Nonetheless, those wicked destroyers were not able to feast on my body, seated around a banquet at the bottom of the sea. Instead, in the morning, wounded by blades, they lay up along the sand, put to sleep by swords, so that they might never afterwards hinder the passage of travellers on the water-ways.

"I struck down nine of the monsters with my own hand. Only later did the currents carry me away. I have never heard such things said of you—even though you happened to slay your brothers, your nearest kin. For that you shall suffer punishment in Hell, fair as your wit may be. I tell you truly, Grendel would never have committed such terrible crimes here in Heorot if you were as warlike as you count yourself. I, however, will soon show him the prowess of the Geats in battle, will execute the noble feat or meet my last day right here in this mead-hall."

Then again, as before, there was laughter among the liegemen, and brave words were spoken—until it came time to retire. The king went to his rest, saying first to Beowulf: "Have now and hold this, the best of houses. Never before have I entrusted it to any man except to you now. Show your strength; keep watch against the enemy. If you escape the contest with your life, you will lack nothing that you desire."

11 Beowulf—who is obliged to assist Hrothgar because of the hospitality shown to his father in days gone by—has been asked to spur the remaining Danish warriors on to the performance of praiseworthy deeds. But Unferth is upset because the newcomer has the ability to achieve the feat which he himself cannot, and so immediately tries to downgrade those reports he has heard of the Geatish adventurer's previous victories over monsters. The Warlike One, however, puts him firmly back in his place.

12 Whales were commonly held to be a menace to ocean-goers, but if Beowulf is really referring to these (or other such) irksome predators of the deep, then why does he wear his full armour in fighting them? Indeed, how can he swim in the sea, with it on him, for a period of five days? Certainly, he is an exaggerated hero: he later wins thirty coats of mail in a foreign skirmish, and swims off to his homeland with them on his arm. ("Thirty", it seems, is the number of men normally found in an individual troop.)
Part IV: The Struggle with the Monster

Then Hrothgar, with his band of retainers, departed the banquet: the aged overlord wished to seek out the queen, his bedfellow; the men wished to take their rest. The King of Glory had appointed Beowulf hall-ward—to keep watch against ogres on behalf of the Danish leader. He put off his iron byrnne and took his helmet from his head, and gave them, together with his decorated battle-blade, to his attendant—a thegn such as a sea-faring warrior had to have in those days to see to his needs.

Then he spoke these words: “I will set aside the sword against Grendel, since he knows nothing of such things, renowned though he be for violent deeds. We shall both fight without weapons. The Lord will assign the victory as he thinks fit.” He lay down, and the pillow received his cheek. Around him, his Geatish companions went to their rest. None of them thought that he would ever return to his birthplace from there. But, to the company of the Weders, the Almighty granted success in the undertaking—in that they utterly overcame their enemy through the endeavours of the one.13

In the gloomy night the shadow-goer came stalking, advancing from the moor under the misty slopes: he bore the

13 The God-fearing Christian warrior, Beowulf, will face up to the hell-born creature, Grendel, without the protection of blade or breast-plate. Instead, he will show him the power of his hand. Meanwhile, in another of the tricks of battle, his men will get the credit for the deed which he will perform almost completely unassisted. Such concepts form the very framework of the literary confrontation.
anger of God. The Destroyer of Men meant to entrap a member of the Human Race in that lofty hall. He came beneath the clouds until he could clearly make out the building, the gold-house of the Danes, shining with adornments. This was not the first time that he had made an attempt on the stronghold of Hrothgar—but never before, in all the days of his life, had he had harder luck against hall-thegns.

The black-hearted brigand came hurrying onwards to Hrothgar’s home-stead—deprived of joys. The door soon gave way when he touched it with his fists: swollen with rage, he swung it open, stepped swiftly, angrily, onto the fair-paved floor. From his eyes gleamed an unpleasant light, much like fire. He saw many a brave warrior slumbering in the chamber, a troop of related kinsmen all together. Then his spirit leapt; he intended, before the day should come, that he would separate the life from the body of each and every one of them.

The monster did not delay, but quickly seized a sleeping soldier, slit him open without resistance, bit into the bone-links, drank the blood from his veins. swallowed great morsels: he had soon devoured him completely, feet and fists. He stepped nearer, reached out towards the stalwart man on his bed. But Beowulf quickly realised his intention and drove back his arm.

The Prince of Crimes soon discovered that nowhere in the middle-earth, in all of the corners of the world, had he met with a mightier hand-grip in an opponent. He could not go from there, although he wanted to flee away to some hiding-place, seek out the companionship of devils in the swamp retreat. It was a sorry journey that the murderous oppressor had made to Heorot. The noble dwelling resounded. ‘Twas a great wonder that it withstood the conflict, that it did not fall down, the fair fold-building—but inside and out it was held all-too-fast by iron bands, cunningly crafted by the smith. The councillors of the Scyldings had not thought that any one might break apart that splendid antlered wine-hall in any wise, destroy it by stealth, unless the outstretched arms of fire were to envelop it in flame.  

Many a mead-bench collapsed there as the steel-hearted ones struggled. But a new sound soon rose above the noise of the collision, bringing dire terror to the North-Danes, to each one of those who heard that cry—the Enemy of God singing his fearful song of defeat. The hellish creature howled with pain: he who was the strongest of fighters in that day and age held him fast. And the stern-minded warrior certainly did not intend the deadly visitant to leave alive.

Beowulf’s fellows drew their swords, purposing to assist him if they could. They did not know that no blade would touch the bloodthirsty vagabond—for by means of a spell he had rendered all weapons useless against him. Then he who had committed crimes against Mankind for such a long time—he feuded with the Father—discovered that his frame would not serve him. The woeful wretch experienced bodily pain; a great wound appeared plainly on his torso; the sinews sprang apart; the bone-connectors burst open. To Beowulf was granted the victory. Mortally wounded, Grendel had to lie away to his dark habitation; he knew well that the number of his days had come.

Thus Beowulf, come from afar, had cleansed Hrothgar’s hall, carried out his boast to the East-Danes, and so ended all the trouble that they had previously suffered. That was very

14 Grendel is a hapless felon—an evil renegade who keeps company with a group of demons. He does not benefit from the gifts dealt out by the king, and comes in from the wilderness to make one of his many strikes at the Danish ring-hall. The stately edifice looks like coming apart at the seams, even though it does not actually give way until the later battle with Ingeld. At that time, it is burned to the ground.
clear when the bold voyager set up the hand, arm and shoulder—all of Grendel’s grip—under the expansive roof of the Danish court.15

In the morning, there was many a man gathered around the gift-hall. Chieftains came from regions far and near to behold that marvel, and indeed to examine the footprints of the foe—for the brute had left traces of his blood all the way back to the monsters’ mere. There was the water welling with battle-blood, the dreadful swirl of the waves all mingled with hot gore. There the heathen soul laid down his life, joyless, in the fen-refuge. There Hell received him.

From that lake, both old companions and young warriors turned homewards, riding their steeds, proclaiming Beowulf’s fame: they said that nowhere in the whole world, between the seas or under the Expanse of Heaven, was there a shield-bearer of greater mark, or one more worthy of a princeedom. (Not at all did they find fault with their own leader, the gracious Hrothgar, for he was a wise and powerful ruler.) At times, when the track was good, they let their horses run races.

At times, one of the king’s thegns, a man of noble speech, mindful of literary etiquette, he who remembered all kinds of old traditions, brought forth other words, properly linked together. He began to tell of Beowulf’s virtue with his poetic skills, artfully to unfurl the now-familiar tale, varying his sayings all the while.

He related the many legendary assaults on the Danish

realm—and how, through the services of a certain ‘Bjarki’, the Scyldings secured the destruction of Hrothgar’s first cousin, the incomparable sea-raider and berserker named ‘Agnar’, when nobody else dared to face him.

At the outset of the duel there was a long debate about which of them ought to have the first turn at wielding the war-flame. For of old, in the ordering of conflicts, men did not try to exchange their thrusts thick and fast; but rather there was a definite succession to the attacking, the contest being carried on with few strokes, and those so terrible that the honour was paid more to their mightiness than to their frequency.

Now Agnar, since he was of higher rank, was given the first blow, which is said to have been so furious that his sword—rare ancestral weapon cunningly worked by giants—anchored itself in the front of Bjarki’s helmet, and split into two pieces. Then the other, dealing his dint in return, and bracing his foot against a tree-trunk so as to get a better swing, passed his fine-edged blade through the middle of Agnar’s body, cleaving asunder his left arm, part of his left side, and his right foot.

“Yet,” said he, “never was there combatant more courageous than that one. He sank down half-conscious and, leaning on his elbow, embraced death eagerly, overcame his extreme anguish of body and of soul with his lips separated into a smile.” The morning light was well advanced when the warriors arrived back at Heorot.16

Then the king himself came forth from the marriage-

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15 The posting of the fiend’s claw is the sign of Beowulf’s ultimate victory—for the strength of the hand is the power symbolically wielded over other men. Otherwise, our hero might have laid claim to a sword or a corselet—or even put up the head of his opposite as a trophy. However, Grendel knows nought of armour or weaponry and, in any case, is not yet dead. In the version of the story just now at hand, he has still to point out the route to his abode.

16 Agnar’s agonised grimace of pain is sometimes interpreted as his way of welcoming his entry into Valhalla—that is, he is said to have ‘died laughing’. This, of course, is as much an aspect of ‘literary etiquette’ as are the aforementioned tellings of the fight: as battle-episode, and as struggle between man and animal. And here also, Bjarki effectively obtains the hilt of the sword—a magnificent weapon which Agnar had likely received from his father as a relic of war—after it has been broken over his head.
chamber, and measured the path to the mead-hall, along with his queen. He stood on the steps, looking at the steep roof and at Grendel’s grisly joint, and spoke these words: “May thanks be given to Almighty God for this sight. I have suffered many afflictions at the hands of this persecutor. It was not long ago that I despaired of ever experiencing a remedy for my woes, while the most majestic of houses stood stained with blood, completely defenceless against devils and demons. But one wight, by the leave of the Lord, has now performed the task that none of us could previously contrive. You, Beowulf, peerless amongst men, I shall cherish as a son. You will lack nothing in the world that you desire, if it lies in my power to give it to you. Many a time have I granted glittering treasures, for lesser feats, to more lowly conscripts, weaker at the war-play. But you yourself, by your exploits, have brought it about that your glory will live for ever and ay.”

And Unferth, the ill-natured son of Ecgfrith, was then the more silent in boasting about acts of defiance, after the princes had examined the fingers of the fiend, considered the clawed limb hanging beneath the high roof. Each nail was just like steel, every hand-spur of the heathen war-monger a horrible sight. Everyone agreed that no iron could have touched him.

A banquet was called. Kinsmen drank many a goblet of mead together in that illustrious hall. Heorot was all filled with friends. (Not, at that point, did any person in the Scylding state practise deeds of malice.) Then, as a reward for his victory, Healfdene’s son presented Beowulf with a gold-embroidered battle-standard, a helmet and a byrnie; and, moreover, a famous and valuable sword, eight steeds with ornamented bridles, and a saddle encrusted with jewels, the king’s very own war-seat—never before had such treasures been granted. Hrothgar gave them to Beowulf—bade him enjoy them well. He also conferred a prize on each man who had made the sea-voyage with Beowulf, and ordered payment to be made for the one whom Grendel had killed.

Music and song joined together—the harp was plucked and many a story was recited along the mead-benches as entertainment. A toast was offered to Beowulf, and twisted gold bestowed on him by Hrothgar’s queen: two arm-rings, a coat of mail, and a mighty neck-lace, the greatest ever spoken of.

Hygelac of the Geats, nephew of Earl Swerting, wore that precious collar on his last campaign, carried it with him over the brimming foam.17 Death took him when, for his pride, he went looking for trouble, a feud with the Frisians. He fell there with his army, the shield-wall broken—and his breast-armour and the circlet together passed then into the grasp of the enemy. Worse fighters plundered the bodies of the slain after the carnage; corpses of Geatish warriors lay on the field.

That was the very finest of feasts. The men drank wine; they did not know the grim fate destined for them, as it would come to pass after evening had arrived.

17 Beowulf will be obliged to hand over most of his earnings, including the ring-collar and the sword, to his uncle, King Hygelac. He will, however, receive other gifts and privileges in return—and these he will keep for himself. Ideally, a blade comes to a warrior from within his own family, and points out his suitability for the kingship—although pieces won in war may be noteworthy in that they signify a means of access to a foreign throne, for a man who is sufficiently valiant.
Part V: The Battle with the Monster-Mother

The king went to his chamber, the powerful man to his rest—leaving his warriors to watch over the building, as they had often done previously. The bench-boards were cleared, spread over with bedding and bolsters; the troopers placed their war-gear at their heads—their towering battle-helms, ringed byrnies and mighty spears; their bright irons and shining wooden shields. It was their custom to be ever ready for action, at any such time as their lord had need of them. They sank, then, into sleep.

It became obvious that an avenger yet survived the loathsome 'spoiler. Grendel's mother, a woman, monster-wife, brooded upon her misery—she who had to inhabit terrible waters, bide in cold streams, after Cain became the edge-slayer of his only brother, kin to him on his father's side; he went then, marked with murder, to flee the joys of the hearth, occupied the wasteland.

From 'Cain' sprang many a fated demon: one of them was Grendel, the hateful mis-begotten hell-spirit whom Beowulf had laid low. He, the Enemy of Human Kind, went—feeling his lowly fortune—to seek out his death-place. And the mother, still greedy and sad at heart, planned to take her grievous journey—to settle the score for the slaughter of her child.

She came then to Heorot, where the Ring-Danes slept, around and about, within the hall. Straightaway there came a reversal of prosperity for the earls, after she made her way in. (The hatred was less by just so much as the strength of a girl
falls short of that of an armed man when he shears through the
boar-crest of his opponent on the plain.) Many a hard-edged
sword was drawn from above the seats, many a broad buckler
heaved up firmly in the hand. None thought of visor or of mail
when the horror befell him.

Quickly she took hold of one of the nobles, intending to
carry him back to the swamp. The one whom she seized at his
rest was the most beloved of Hrothgar’s men, a shield-fighter
of great renown. (Beowulf was not there, for he had been
given lodging elsewhere.) She also took—covered in gore—
the claw of her offspring. There was an outcry in Heorot; grief
rose up in the dwellings once more.18

Then was the wise monarch, the hoary old helmsman,
cruelly troubled when he learned that the most valued of his
thegns was dead. Beowulf was fetched—he went at daybreak,
together with his comrades, to where the elderly leader awaited
him. The battle-worthy warrior strode across the boards—the
hall floor resounded—until he stood before the king. Beowulf
asked him whether the night had been pleasant ...

Hrothgar, greater statesman of the Scyldings, spoke: “Do
not ask for glad tidings. Sorrow is come once more to the
Danish folk. Aschere is dead, my trusted counsellor, my closest
companion in the field, slain by the hand of a murderous
wandering hell-hag. She has sought to requite the quarrel,
in that, yester-night, you defeated Grendel with your fierce
grip. He fell in the fight, having forfeited his life; and now
this other mighty Destroyer of Men has come, meaning to
exact vengeance on us for the killing of her kinsman. She has
already gone far, it seems, in doing so.

“I heard those who reside in the realm—my people, the
hall-rulers—say that they saw two such monstrous march-
steppers holding the moors: one of them was, as best they
could make out, in the likeness of a woman; the other wretched
creature trod the tracks of exile in the form of a man, except
that he was bigger than any other mortal. That one, in days of
yore, the fold-dwellers named ‘Gren-del’. They recognised no
father—whether any secret, mysterious miscreant was brought
forth before him.

“The marauders mount guard over a secret land, wolf-
infested scarp, windy crags, dangerous fen-paths where the
mountain stream passes downwards under the earth. It is
not far from here that the lake stands: over its waters hang
frost-bound trees, held fast by the roots. No one of the Children
of Men has yet discovered its bottom. Even the Hart with its
strong antlers, hunted by hounds, will yield up its life on the
bank rather than enter into the gloom there.
"That is not a pleasant place! From it waves rise up to blacken the skies when the wind stirs its surface, until the air grows dark and the heavens weep. Now once again the remedy is left to you alone. You do not yet know the spot where you might find that very sinful assailant. Approach it if you dare—and I will pay you with ancient treasures, as I did before, if you should make your way back unharmed." 19

Beowulf spoke: "Let us go quickly to view the trail left by Grendel's kinswoman. I promise you this: she will not escape, go where she will."

The horses were prepared, and the force of men set out for the lough, following the prints of the she-monster along the forest track, the marks made as she carried her kill over the murky moor. They passed over steep slopes, by a narrow way, a solitary path atop high rugged peaks, many an abode of wild beasts—until suddenly they came upon mountain-trees leaning over the grey rock. Underneath was the water, gory and troubled and, on the cliff alongside of it, the head of Ascere.

Time and again a bugle sounded its eager battle-cry. The entire troop sat down. They saw through the swell a multitude of the race of worms, strange sea-dragons exploring the depths, and water-monsters lying on the slopes of the ness, those such as oft turn their attentions towards luckless travellers on the sail-road. They fell away when they heard the war-horn calling

19 The identification of the lair as a pagan site, which the Christian hart will not approach, suggests some kind of alien holding, outside the confines of the kingdom ruled by Healfdene's son. But it is unusual that Hrothgar can describe the lake and its surrounds, in spite of the fact that he has not been there himself—or that he thinks to advise Beowulf of the name of the male aggressor, when the Geatish visitor already knows it. Indeed, by speaking obscurely of Grendel's father, he is simply being coy, for the monster has already been precisely identified as the son of Cain.
out its song. The prince of the Geats struck one of them with an arrow from his bow, parted it from its life, while the other warriors hooked it with their barbed spears, and dragged it onto the ledge, where they closely examined the hideous viper.

Then Beowulf girded himself in his military garb: he feared not in the least for his life. The hand-woven war-byrnie would have to test the bottom of the pool—it was able to protect his body so that no hostile grip might injure him. A burnished helmet defended his head, encircled with chains and set about with boar-images, so that no battle-brand might bite into it. And a mighty hammer-forged sword by the name of Hrunting was loaned to him, a weapon which had never before failed any one who had carried it into the conflict.

Beowulf spoke: "Now, most valiant son of Healfdene, I am ready to start out on this expedition. If I should lose my life in your service, take charge of my young thegns, and send to Hygelac the gifts that you gave to me. Thus may he know that I found you a most generous ring-dealer. I shall win glory with Hrunting, or death will take me." With those words, the warrior of the Weder-Geats plunged into the torrent. It was the better part of a day before he could make out the bottom of the mere.

The ravenous scourge soon discovered that some challenger from above was exploring the homeland of alien beings. She groped towards him, seized him in her terrible grip, but could not penetrate the interlocked limb-shirt with her hateful fingers. The brim-wolf lugged him then into her lair, so that he was unable to wield his weapons. And many a strange sea-beast pursued him there, harassed him in the flood, attempted to pierce his mail-coat with sharp tusks. Then the brave hero realised that he was in some-kind-of-enemy-hall, where no water might oppress him in any way. He saw fire-light, a luminous flame, brightly shining.

The great one recognised, then, the fiendish creature of the deep, the abominable lake-wife. He attacked strongly with his war-sword, did not hold back at all, so that it sang a greedy song on her head. He discovered, however, that the blade would not bite—its edges failed him in his time of need. But he was no-wise lacking in courage. Angry, he threw down the piece so that it lay on the ground, and put his trust solely in the strength of his hand. So must a man do when he thinks to gain enduring praise—not worry about his life.

Then the prince of the War-Geats grabbed Grendel's mother by the arms, shrinking not at all from the feud. Swollen with rage, the deed-famed contender dragged his deadly foe downwards, so that she sank to the floor. Swiftly she came back at him, repaid him with fierce grips. The strongest of fighting-men overbalanced, so that he took a fall. Then she held that hall-guest down and drew her knife; she wished to avenge her son, her only child. The woven breast-net lay on Beowulf's shoulder—it protected his life against both point and edge.

Beowulf got to his feet once more. He saw a midst the armour-heap a treasured keepsake—an ancient victory-brand made by giants, the choicest of weapons, except that it was bigger than any other body might bear to the battle-play. The Scyldings' champion seized it by the handle, hit out at her angrily so that it caught her hard in the neck, broke the bone-rings: the blade passed straight through her body. She fell

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20 Grendel's followers are said to be of the order of serpents, or dragons, whilst Grendel himself is thought to have the form of a large man, but also the semblance of a beast. And Beowulf swims underwater for several hours before he meets the monster's mother, who is depicted as both a woman and a wolf. He fights single-handedly with her, after going to the place of her lair with a whole host of helpers.
dead on the floor. The sword was bloody; the man rejoiced in his achievement. 21

He looked around the building, brandishing the war-steel firmly by the hilt. Light shone from within, even as the candle of the sky shines from Heaven. By the wall he saw Grendel, lying at rest, lifeless, played out from the fighting at Heorot. He intended to pay him out for his many infamous attacks on the West-Danes. The body split apart when, after death, it suffered the savage blow: Beowulf had carved off his head.

Those who gazed at the billows from above with Hrothgar saw that they were all stained with blood. They did not expect to see the hero return: indeed, it seemed to them that the wolfish antagonist had killed him. The Scyldings gave up the crag all too soon, went back to their homes; but Beowulf's band stayed on, sick at heart, staring at the mere, hoping but not expecting to see their leader once more.

Then the guardian of sea-farers came to land, swimming boldly upwards, bringing with him nothing but the he-monster's head and the haft of the sword—whose blade had in fact melted away with the hot blood of the border-demon who had died in the darkness there. His men went to meet him; they thanked God, rejoiced that they might see him safe. His helmet and his byrnie were loosened from him. The lake grew still, the waters under the skies.

21 When Beowulf's own sword fails, another soon appears before him. Its position at the very centre of the stockpiled war-gear suggests that it has been borne away from an earlier conflict as some kind of trophy. Note that using a specific weapon to get vengeance upon another is one of the conventions of the time—but that the reasons for the employment of a particular sword may be withheld for a time for the purposes of the staging.
Part VI: The Lord of Denmark and the Son of Froda

They went from there, with joyous hearts, along the now-familiar way. Grim-minded men brought Grendel's skull back to the gold-hall with difficulty—it took four of them to lift it. The leader of the Geats came striding in to meet with Hrothgar; the head was then borne into the building by its hair, a dreadful sight, an object of terror to the warriors.

Beowulf spoke: "Well, lord-king Hrothgar, prince of Scyldings, we have brought you this sea-booty as a token of your glory. I only just came through that conflict alive. I could achieve nothing with Hruting, but God granted that I saw, hanging splendid on the wall, an ancient and all-powerful sword, a well-wrought weapon, superior to every other. With this sword I struck down the guardians of that house when I got the chance. The patterned blade burned up in the hot gore—but I carried the hilt away from those fiends, avenged the wicked deeds, the killing of Danes, as it was fitting. You and your companions may now sleep in Heorot, free of care."

Then was the golden remnant, time-honoured work of giants, given into the hand of the aged war-chief: after the Fall of Devils it passed into the control of the best of earthly kings between the seas, the very noblest of those who dealt out wealth in the Danish dominion. Hrothgar examined the haft of the old heirloom. On it was engraved the origin of the strife—how the surging sea-flood flowed down on the society of sinners, brought great torment upon them. (They were a
race alien to the Heavenly Father. He paid them their final reward for that.) On it, in runic lettering, it was marked and set down for whom that sword, the finest of irons, had first of all been fashioned.22

The wise one, the son of Healfdene, spoke: "Anyone who speaks truly may say that you, Beowulf, are the bravest of all men. Your fame, my friend, will be extolled throughout distant provinces. I shall stand by my commitment to you, as we agreed a short time ago. You will become a comfort to your people, a help to heroes. God gives to Man a homeland and a realm to rule over, makes other regions subject to him, and the whole world bend to his will—so that he, in his unsworn, may not imagine any end to it. For one hundred seasons I governed the Ring-Danes, kept them safe with spear and edge from the many tribes of this middle-earth, and did not believe I had any opponent under the Expanse of the Skies—that is to say, until ‘Grendel’, the old enemy, became my invader. Thanks be to the Eternal Lord that I have lived long enough to look upon his blood-stained head. Go now to your seat, join in the festivities. When it is morning, a profusion of treasures will be yours."

Once again a feast was spread—men rejoiced until night came and it was time for sleep. The troop rose up; the grey-haired old Scylding went to his repose. The Geats also took their rest. The hall towered up, vaulted and adorned with gold. Within it the guests slumbered until the black raven announced the day. Then came brightness hastening onwards, light after the shadows.

22 If a man commits a murder, then he (or his offspring) must be punished. And if a sword is lost in battle, it must be restored, either to its original owner, or to the son of its owner—as Healfdene’s is (no doubt) returned to King Hrothgar by ‘Bothvar Bjarki’ after the death of ‘Agnar’. We can assume that Ingeld had taken this sword from Healfdene as part of the spoils of war, and that he had handed it on to his son after they had been reconciled.

The Geatish campaigners came forth, eager to return to their own country; the voyagers wished to bend their steps towards their ship. Beowulf himself, battle-hardy duellist, went to speak with Hrothgar, addressed him thus: "Now we sea-farers, come from afar, have to say that we are of a mind to seek out Hygelac. We have been very properly treated here—and if I may in any way gain more of your favour than I have yet done, I will straightway be ready. If, over the expanse of the ocean, I hear that those sitting around you again threaten you with terrors, as those hating you at one time did, I will bring a thousand warriors to your aid."

Hrothgar spoke thus in answer to him: "I have never heard so young a man speak so well. You are mighty in strength, wise in thought, and sensible in words. I think it likely that—if war or sickness should take Hrothel’s sons, and you should still be alive—then the Sea-Geats would have no-one better to choose as their lord—if you would want to hold your kinsman’s kingdom. Your goodness of heart pleases me ever the more, my beloved Beowulf. You have brought it about that there will be lasting fellowship between the Geats and the Spear-Danes." Then Healfdene’s successor gave Ecgtheow’s worthy son twelve gifts, bade him go back to his native land in safety, clasped him around the neck and kissed him. Tears fell from the old man’s eyes: he feared that they would not see each other again.

Beowulf came then, with his band of men, to the beach of the sea. He saw the sentry there, watching for enemies from foreign shores, as before, at the top of the cliff—he did not greet the visitors with high words, as he had when they had arrived, but rode to meet them, said that they, in their bright armour, would be most welcome to the folk of the Weders. The broad-bosomed ship lay at anchor: it was loaded then with battle-gear, horses, and other precious wares—a profusion of wondrous gifts from Hrothgar’s hoard. And Beowulf gave
to the boat-ward a sword inlaid with gold, so that he was thereafter honoured the more on the mead-bench on account of that prize.23

The vessel gave up the Danish isles, moved out into deep water. The sail was fixed to the mast with a rope; the timbers groaned. In no way did the wind hinder the craft on its journey. The sea-traveller went forth, floated foamy-necked over the streams of the flood, until the warriors could make out the familiar promontories of Geatland, the windswept walls of the ocean. Driven by draughts of air, the keel pressed forwards, until it came to land.

The coastguard of the Weders, he who had for a long time kept watch for the cherished crew far across the currents, came quickly to meet them. He moored the ship in the sand.

23 The value of a man’s arms reflects his worth as a fighter, and determines the place he will occupy at the feast-table in relation to the king and the other heroes. Beowulf’s own winnings include horses, weapons, and protective equipment—the kinds of things most necessary for his success as a soldier.

lest the force of the waves should bear it away. Then he ordered that the treasures of earls, the gold and the ornaments, be borne up to where Hygelac Hrethling dwelt with his retainers near to the sea-wall.

Then Beowulf and his hand-troop trod the beach, made their way to the splendid Geatish stronghold—the elevated fortress in which the young war-leader, slayer of Ongentheow, was dealing out rings.24 It was straightaway made known to Hygelac that there, in the precincts, his shield-companion came striding back to the court, unhurt from the hild-play. The Geat-prince commanded the floor to be cleared for the band of foot-travellers. Then he who had survived the combat sat down facing the king, kinsman opposite kinsman. The queen moved through the room bringing drink to the men.

Hygelac began to question his comrade about his adventures. “Dearest Beowulf, how did you fare on that expedition, when you suddenly resolved to seek out the battle, far away over the salt water at Heorot? I have been brooding about it with surging care, sorrow of the soul, not trusting in the undertaking at all. I long implored you not to approach that blood-thirsty creature—to let the South-Danes sort out the difficulties with Grendel by themselves. I give thanks to God that I am allowed to see you un-scathed.”

Beowulf spoke: “I avenged it all, so that none of Grendel’s kin on earth—not he who, steeped in sin, lives yet of that

24 At this time the Geats are still an independent nation, and have their own mead-hall, apparently at Göteborg. They are under the command of Hygelac—third son of King Hrethel, and nephew (by marriage) to Earl Swerting—a man who is waging an ongoing war with the Swedish kings in order to maintain his ancestral land-rights. Hygelac has, it seems, already defeated one of these very powerful monarchs—and presumably not lamented too much the loss of Swerting or his alien issue. He has, though, been gravely concerned for the safe-keeping of his own nephew.
hateful race—will have reason to boast of that night-time skirmish. After I came to that gold-house to greet Hrothgar, and as soon as he knew my intentions, I was assigned a seat facing his own sons. The troop was happy; at times the Danish queen—peace-pledge between nations—passed through the building, presenting gifts as encouragement to the young warriors; sometimes Hrothgar’s daughter bore the ale-cup to the older ones. I heard those sitting in the hall call her ‘Freawaru’.

"Young, adorned with gold, she is promised in marriage to the glorious son of Froda. The plan has been decided upon by the councillors of the Danes—and the Scyldings’ friend, staunch defender of the kingdom, thinks it good advice that, by means of this woman, he should settle, once and for all, his share of deadly feuds. Yet it is not often that the spear rests for even a little while after the death of a prince, fair though the bride may be."

"It may displease the chieftain of the Heathobards, and every thgn of that people—when the new-come lordling takes his place in the beer-hall beside the maiden—that the sons of Danes are entertained as guests there. On them will glisten the relics of ancestors, hard hand-forged blades, the treasures of Bard warriors whissoever they were able to wield their weapons in the shield-play.

"Then an old spear-fighter sojourning there—he who is stout of heart—will prompt a young champion to action, remind him of the miseries of war; will speak after this fashion: ‘Dost thou, colleague, not know the sword, that most excellent of irons that thy father carried to the encounter, when the Danes, the high and mighty Scyldings, brought him down and had control of the battlefield? Now, here, some son or other of those arrogant slaughterers goes about at the banquet, proud in his trappings, boasts of the bloodshed and wears the war-gear which, by right, should be thine.’

"At every opportunity, thus, will he urge and admonish him, taunt him with hard words—until the time comes that the man will sleep, stained with blood from the bite of the bill, his life forfeit on account of the elder’s deeds. Then oaths will be broken on both sides; later deadly hatred will well up in Ingeld and his love for his wife will grow the cooler. For that reason, I do not consider this noble-Heathobard-peace-pact with the Danes to be without deceit, a firm friendship.

"I shall tell you yet more about Grendel. After heaven’s gem had gone to its rest, the angry demon came to visit us where we stood guard over the hall; seized a thgn, swallowed it; his body all whole. Then the bloody-toothed bane turned to me. It is too long to relate how I paid him back for his every evil deed. He got away to enjoy his life for a short while more—but his hand remained behind him in Heorot. "

25 With his force so depleted in the recent war(s) with Agnar that he cannot continue to fight, Hrothgar agrees to let Ingeld re-enter the Danish fold, providing him with his own gift-hall and the hand of his daughter in marriage and thereby overlooking the murder of his own father, Healfdene. But Ingeld, ever false and faithless, will soon come to exploit the situation in much the same way as he has utilised his former covenant with the Swedes. Indeed, it will be seen that some elements of this and the following narration echo quite specifically the episode of him and his first wife: the slaying of a kinsman and the taunting of a young warrior by an older spokesman; the upheaval at the banquet; the ensuing slaughter of new-found friends; and, moreover, the roundabout way of mentioning Ingeld and his relationship with his son (however tenuous it might have been).

26 Ingeld, who is probably as glad of the loss of his child as of the earlier murder of his sire, ultimately uses the incident of the plundered sword as an excuse to gather his armies and bring them against his new father-in-law. However, this second play for Danish power also fails, and he is killed. (Presumably, his widow then returns, along with her dowry, to the protection of her parents.)
Scylding leader rewarded me well for that, after morning had come and we had sat down to the feast.

"All through the day we took our pleasure, in merrymaking and in song, until another night came upon us. Then Grendel’s mother made a sorry journey to avenge the injury, the massacre of her son. The monstrous woman boldly killed one of the warriors, carried his body off to her lair, leaving no hope of laying him on the pyre. I sought her out there, struggled with her in the turbulent waters beneath the mountain-stream, cut off her head with a mighty blade. Healfdene’s son again compensated me—with treasures of my choice. I bring those gifts to you, Hygelac, my king. I have few surviving relatives, except for thee."

Then Beowulf presented him with the battle-banner, the high helmet and grey byrnie, the splendid war-sword and circlet, and with four swift steeds the colour of yellow apples. So shall a kinsman do—not weave a web of malice for the other, plot the death of a close companion with hidden craft.

The nephew was very faithful to Hygelac, and the uncle kept Beowulf’s welfare in mind as well.

Thus the son of Ecgtheow bore himself honourably. In turn, Hygelac granted him Hrethel’s heirloom, the gold-bedecked bill which had once belonged to his own father, laid it in his lap, bestowed on him seven thousand hides, a hallbuilding, and a prince’s throne. Both held land by inheritance in the country—the elder a particularly wide kingdom, because his rank was higher.27

27 Beowulf dutifully gives his acquisitions to his lord, Hygelac, and receives estates, a hall, and a certain weapon in return. This gives him much influence, but still not as much as that had by his uncle. Even so, he is quite content with his allocated share. The bestowal on him of his grandfather’s sword means that he is now held to be worthy of succeeding to the Geatish kingship, despite the fact that he is only the son of Hrethel’s daughter. The blade will subsequently be put to the test in the defence of the nation—for Beowulf will soon enough be forced to fight for his political survival in the same way as the Danish king, Hrothgar, has just now had to do.
Part VII: The Encounter with the Dragon

In later days, after Hygelac lay dead, and the battle-blades of the Swedes had brought down his son, Heardred, it came about that the broader kingdom passed into Beowulf’s hand. For five and twenty winters he ruled it well, a wise old guardian of the fatherland—until in the dark nights a certain one began to hold sway, a dragon who in his lofty residence, his steep stone barrow, watched over a hoard.

A slave fleeing hostile blows had found his way inside, seeking sanctuary—a servant beset by sin, in dire need of a lodging. On spying the hideous monster lurking therein, he had seen his chance of absolution—had stolen away with a precious drinking-cup, one of many ancient ornaments hidden there by the lone survivor of a proud and peerless warrior-race. Death had taken off all of that man’s fellows—the hall-troop had passed from the world.28

No longer was there joy in the harp; no more did the steed stamp, battle-eager, in the forecourt. So, mournful and steeped in sorrow, the solitary one lamented his loss, moved grief-stricken through the endless days and nights until the wellings

28 In another story, the wayward slave is Swedish—one time treasurer to Aun, that very king who is the father of the character known to us as ‘Ongentheow’—and there he buries the treasure for his own use. Our particular narration, however, is set somewhat later, in the time of Onela; the original owners of the ‘hoard’ are unspecified; and it is the last warrior who lays the wealth down. The differences are significant but, to those in the know, the appropriated details place the kings of the Swedes right at the forefront of the present account.
of death touched his heart. A burial-mound stood all-ready near the sea-waves: he bore the glittering gold inside, consigned it to the ground, for he himself expected soon afterwards to die.

The barefaced, bloodthirsty dragon—he who flies by night with fire—found the sparkling stockpile standing open. (The fold-dwellers fear him very much. He shall set upon a store in the earth.) So the people's foe held a mighty-large treasure-house—until the fugitive bondsman kindled the monster's wrath, carried the gold-plated goblet to his courteous lord, asked him for a pledge-of-peace. Thus was the hoard razed, the heap of rings diminished, the boon granted to the wretched thrall.

Then the serpent awoke: the quarrel was renewed. He discovered the footprint of the enemy, looked eagerly for the churl who had treated him badly while he slept. He found no-one. However, he rejoiced in the thought of a fight, the act of war.29

The hoard-ward waited with difficulty until the evening came: bulging with rage, he wanted to repay with fire the theft of the costly drinking-vessel. Then, to the worm's relief, the day passed. He would stay no longer within the defences, but set out with flame and ready fire, began to burn the bright houses, bringing terror to men. (The hateful flying thing wished to leave nothing living there.) Then it was evident far and wide how the battle-scatter had persecuted and humbled the community of the Geats. He had encircled the landsmen with burning and with brand. He returned to his secret, splendid hall before the day came, put his trust in the barrow, warfare, and the wall. He was deceived.

The fire-breather had completely destroyed the stronghold of the people from the sea-board to the heart-land. Beowulf's own home, the gift-throne of the Geats, had also been burned up. The war-king, illustrious leader of the Weders, planned his revenge. He ordered a wondrous shield to be made for him, all of iron, for he knew well that wood would not stand against flame. Nonetheless, he was to come to the end of his days—and the blood-stained serpent as well, long though that being had held the apportioned wealth.30

I scorned to meet the intruder with a large force, cared not a bit for his life, counted the worm's war-power at very little, because he had survived many clashes-of-arms since he had cleansed Hrothgar's hall and completely overcome Grendel's kinswoman—that creature of loathsome race—in the contest.

Not the least of those encounters was when his most cherished uncle, Hygelac, was slain, beaten down by the sword in a pitched battle with the Frisians. Beowulf came from there through his special skill, performed a feat of swimming, held in his hand the trappings of thirty of his enemies as he entered into the water. Alone, the dauntless venturer journeyed over the stretch of the waves—took passage back to his people.

29 Just as a woman is passed between nations as a token of their friendship, so is the cup shared amongst the warriors as a sign of their unity. Thus, when the dragon's extremely valuable utensil is stolen, he is 'up in arms' about the loss, and looks to open the dispute with his neighbours once more. The Geatish nobleman, however, is rather more pleased about the theft, for it greatly reduces the size of the hoard—and so the slave is granted his reprieve. But unlike Aun's light-fingered vassal—who takes it upon himself to fight the new Swedish king for control of the nation's treasure-pile—this man is probably no more than a simple runaway. It is the wilful dragon who does the watching now.

30 The bloody-minded mischief-maker comes out of his earth-fortress to attack Geatland and Beowulf vows, rightly, to exact vengeance on him. He would normally be able to use the captured booty to enhance his own hoard—just as Froda has utilised the accumulated riches of his particular dagon to pay his troops and finance his military campaigns—but he will not get the opportunity. His fate is already sealed.
There Hygelac's widow offered him both hoard and kingdom, because she did not believe that her son could hold the nation's throne against alien folk. But he could by no means be persuaded to take the lordship over Heardred, or to accept the royal commission. Instead, Beowulf supported the boy with good advice and with honour, until he became older and ruled the Geats.

The sons of Othhere, cast out from their homeland, sought out the new Geatish chieftain over the freezing waters (for they had rebelled against their uncle, the most powerful of the sea-kings who dispensed treasure in the Swedish realm). That was to be the young man's end: by cause of his hospitality to them, Hygelac's successor received his death-wound by the stroke of a sword. And when Heardred lay dead, Ongentheow's son turned back to seek out his home—allowed Beowulf to have the head-ship, to wear the crown of the Weders.

In later days, Beowulf kept in mind the need to avenge the prince's fall, became a friend to the destitute Eadgils, advanced his cause over the wide sea with warriors and with weapons; took vengeance for the slaying of Heardred, deprived Onela of his life in an expedition. Thus he, the goodly man of the Weder-Geats, had come through each and every dangerous conflict until that particular day that he had to go out against the worm.31

Then the Geat-leader went, bulging with rage, as one of

31 The 'uncle' of the princes, and the 'son' of Ongentheow, is Onela. On the death of his brother, Othhere, he seizes the Swedish throne; murders the youthful Geatish king. Heardred. for helping Othhere's sons (in their attempt to recover it); and then (as will soon be revealed) grants his henchman a generous reward for killing the elder of the two boys. He subsequently allows his distant relation, Beowulf, to act as his regent in Geatland—but, some time later, Beowulf pays him back. (Other sources tell how 'Ali', or Onela, meets the ubiquitous warrior 'Bjarki' on the ice of Lake Vaenir, in central Sweden, and does battle with him there.)

twelve, to take stock of the dragon. (By then he had learned the reason why the feud had arisen, the pernicious wickedness of men.) The slave, as the thirteenth man in the band, had to lead the way, quite against his will, to the spot where he knew the enemy to be—a certain subterranean hall, an underground cave by the sea-shore, full of works of art and metal ornaments. The monstrous guardian, ready fighter, held the golden treasures, old under the earth. It would be no easy task for any warrior to win them.

Then the king sat on the headland, wished his hearth-companions good luck. His spirit was sorrowful, the time very near when he would meet his end. Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, addressed his beloved retainers for the last time: "In youth I survived many a conflict, not a few periods of strife. I was seven winters old when Hrethel took me on from my father. He dealt with me well, took heed of our kinship, treated me just like one of his sons: Herebealh, Hathcyn, and my own dear Hygelac.

"The first of them had his death at the hands of Hathcyn, who missed his mark and shot dead his blood-relative, one brother the other, with an arrow from the bow. That was an act without any life-fee, and so the prince had to give up his life avenged. His sire, full of suffering—unable to square the account in any other wise—forsook the Worldly Life, chose God's light, left the killer the land and the fortress in the same way as a happy man would have done.32

"After Hrethel died, there was ongoing conflict between the Swedes and the Geats, bitter hostility across the wide

32 Hathcyn assassinates his older brother, Herebealh, and represents it as a hunting accident—and his father, Hrethel, unable to take retributive action against him, dies of a broken heart. But his passing leaves the country open to the several attacks of Ongentheow and his two very warlike sons—both of whom have a claim on the Geatish throne by way of their mother.
water. Bold, and bent on fighting, the covetous Swede-crew would keep no peace over the sea—but often brought about terrible slaughter around Ware’s Burh. The war was fatal to Hathcyn, lord of the Geats—but his devoted kinsman, Hygelac, took vengeance for that on his slayer, Ongentheow.33

“Now shall the blade’s edge, hand and hard sword, fight freshly for the hoard. I will seek out the feud, perform glorious deeds, if the shameless Destroyer of Men will come out of his earth-hall to meet me. I will not retreat the space of a footstep from the guardian of the barrow—but, at the rampart, it shall go for both of us just as fate decrees. You men, wait here on the knoll, to see which one of us two can better endure the wounds from this onslaught. It is my responsibility alone to stand against the monster. I shall win the gold with valour, or war will take me.”

Then the renowned warrior arose, went defiantly under the rocky outcrop, trusting completely in his own strength. That is not the way of a coward! He saw pillars of stone, and a stream of hot fire flowing forth from the crypt: on account of the dragon’s flame he could not survive for even a short period of time in the hollow near the hoard without getting burnt. Then, because he was enraged, the warden of the Weder-Geats let forth a cry from his breast; the war-call echoed in the earthen chamber.

The hoard-keeper, hearing the sound, was roused to hatred. A blast of hot battle-breath came out from under the scarp; the

33 Those slain in the Swedo-Geatish struggle are, on the one side, Ongentheow and (ultimately) Onela and, on the other, Hathcyn, Heordred and Eanmund. (Otherwise, we are told elsewhere, loses his life early on, fighting against the Danes.) These events are related not in the sequence of their happening, but essentially in reverse order, and so it is sometimes difficult to tell who is fighting whom, and why—but it is important to bear in mind that, as king of Geatland, Beowulf is contemporary only with Onela.

ground shook. The vigorous fight-upholder then turned his shield against the dreadful stranger and drew his broadsword, that ancient iron not dull of edge. The worm coiled himself quickly together and so went forth against the fellow.

The shield protected the noble leader, in life and in limb, for a lesser time than he had expected. He struck the horrid creature thirstily with his sword so that the burnished blade gave way on the bone, bit into it less strongly than he needed it to. Then the barrow-ward’s heart grew savage after that most hostile of strokes: he let forth deadly fire, the flames of battle sprang wide.

The gold-friend of the Geats could boast of no victory: the war-sword failed in the contest as it should not have done.
The famed son of Ecgtheow was to give up the face of the earth, just as each individual is to yield up those days loaned to him. Enveloped in flame, he who had ruled the people suffered great distress. Not at all did his companions rally 'round him; instead, they made for the wood, saved their lives. In one of them only did courage rise up. A man may never turn aside from ties of friendship.\(^{34}\)

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Part VIII: Wiglaf

This man was called Wiglaf, a most excellent battle-fighter of the Swedish race, the son of Weohstan. He saw his lord suffering from the heat. Then he remembered the property that Beowulf had given him: a rich dwelling-place, and each estate that his father had owned. He could not then hold back—his hand seized the yellow lindenwood shield; he drew his ancient sword, known among men as the relic of Ohthere’s son, Eanmund.

Wiglaf’s father had become the slayer of Eanmund when that boy was a friendless exile, and had borne away to his own land the bright-shining helmet, the ringed byrnie, and the magnificent old sword wrought by giants. Onela granted him all that, his own relative’s armour; he said nothing of a feud, albeit that Weohstan had cut down his brother’s child.

Weohstan held those trappings for many a season, until his son was of an age to work feats-of-arms. He left to the boy—among the Geats—all kinds of equipment when he passed away from life. This was the first time that the youthful campaigner was to go into battle alongside his noble lord.\(^{35}\)

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\(^{34}\) A number of hand-picked fighters accompany Beowulf on his dragon-quest, even though he has stated that the onus to measure swords with the brute is on him alone. However, when his own weapon fails, just one of his troopers stays to help. This man brings a new implement to his aid—a fortunate edge such as the one which he has acquired in the lair of the water-monsters. The history of this iron, as will next be seen, is most pertinent to the resolution of the Dragon Controversy.

\(^{35}\) Wiglaf is the son of Beowulf’s sister, and of the Swedish warrior, Weohstan. He inherits two things on the death of his father: first, those Geatish land-holdings which were originally a part of his mother’s dowry (apparently forfeited by Weohstan for siding with the Swedish king) and, second, the self-same sword as was taken from Eanmund in battle (donated to Weohstan by Onela for services rendered). Eanmund is killed while he is a guest at the Geatish court, and probably during the same encounter as that in which Onela kills Heordred.
Neither did his spirit weaken, nor did his father's heirloom fail in the fray. The worm soon found that out after they had come together in combat.

Wiglaf spoke, said many a seemly word: "I remember the time that we drank mead—when in the beer-hall we promised our ring-dealer that we would pay him back for his gifts of war-gear, helmets and hard swords, if such a pass as this were to come. Thus he himself chose us for this expedition, considered us worthy of great exploits, because he held us to be good spear-fighters, valiant edge-bearers—even though, for our sake, he thought to perform this deed unaided.

"Now is the day that our prince has need of good warriors; now may we find out who will be keen. I will advance, lend support to my virtuous leader, while the grim fire is upon him. Ever may he mourn, who has thought to wend from this war-play: God knows, I would much rather that fire should embrace my body with my gold-giver than that I should carry my shield home again, without first having defeated the foe. To us shall be sword and helm, byrnie and battle-gear, both together."

He went through the deadly smoke, took his boar-crested head-wear to the assistance of his lord, spoke these few words: "Beloved Beowulf, use every ounce of your courage now, bold sovereign; defend your life with all your might! I will stand by you every inch of the way."

36 Wiglaf vows to repay the Geatish king for the gifts he has granted him. He teams up with his mother's people rather than his father's because Beowulf is both his blood-relation and also his lord. Of course, his actions appear all the more extraordinary because the others have taken flight, but it is important to realise that the theme of going against a family-member (or, in this case, contrary to a father's innate political affiliations) is fairly common in literature—just as is that of fighting singly in battle. And here, also, one shield will be used to denote the entire defensive wall.

After these words, the serpent, horrible alien malefactor, came on for a second time, hot and angry, to seek out his hateful human opponents. The flame came forth in waves, burned Wiglaf's wooden buckler all the way up to the boss.
The coat of mail could likewise afford him no help. But the youth went bravely under his kinsman’s shield, after his own was engulfed by the dragon’s fire.

Again the king struck a mighty blow, so that his sword drove into the dragon’s head. The weapon, however, broke into pieces, failed in the struggle: it was not granted to him that its iron edges might serve him in the conflict. Then, for the third time, was the terrible fire-drake mindful of feuds; he rushed fiercely upon Beowulf when the opportunity arose, seized him about the neck with his venomous tusks until the doughty man was all covered in blood and gore.

Then, it is said, the warrior at Beowulf’s side showed his courage and his daring, as was natural to him. The brave body-guard did not heed the head—and thus his hand was burned as he helped his kinsperson by striking the odious creature rather lower down, so that the plated, shining sword sank in, and the fire began to subside. Then the king of the Geats pulled himself together, drew the battle-sharp knife that he wore on his mail-shirt, and ran the worm through the middle. Thus had they felled the foe, cut him down both together, the kindred noblemen. So should a man be, a thane in time of need.  

Then the wound that the earth-serpent had inflicted on Beowulf began to burn and swell, the deadly poison welling up in his breast. (That was the very last time of victory brought about through his own deeds.) He eased himself down onto the ground. That young retainer, Wiglaf, good beyond measure, then bathed his blood-stained lord with

37 Beowulf’s own sword, although otherwise remarkable, proves in the end to be completely inadequate for the purpose of settling the conflict with the reptile. (Indeed, its failure signifies the initial cracks in the veneer of Geatsish independence.) And yet, in due course, a new blade is put at his disposal—one seized during an earlier battle between the Swedes and the Geats. Swords often come on a circuitous course to those who will use them as instruments of vengeance. As Saxo says in his History: ‘Happy ... is he who can ... with righteous steel punish the guilt of treacheries’.
water, and unfastened the famous prince’s helmet and sark. Beowulf spoke, despite his deadly wound; he knew well that he had reached the end of his days, that death was very near.

“I would have given this battle-garb to my son, if I had been granted such a successor. I ruled this nation for twenty five winters, sought no hateful quarrels, and swore no false oaths. Now, sick with mortal wounds, I can take heart in the fact that, on this my Day of Judgement, when my life passes from my body, the Ruler of Men will not censure me for the treacherous murder of kinsmen.38

“Go quickly, dear nephew, to examine the hoard, now that the worm lies sleeping from a sorry wound, deprived of treasure. Make haste, so that I may view the gold and thus the more easily relinquish my life, and the country which I have ruled for so long a time.”

Then Weohstan’s son obeyed his wounded lord. As he went in under the roof of the barrow, he saw many a precious jewel; gold glittering on the ground; wonderful things on the walls of the worm’s den; many a helmet, old and rusty; many an armlet, skillfully forged. Also, he saw an insignia, all gilden, hanging high above the heap. Wiglaf took bowls and dishes—whatever he wished—and also the banner, the brightest of beacons. Yet he pushed on, for he was eager to return, anxious to know whether the prince of the Weders was still alive.

He found him as he had left him—all bloody and near to death. Once again he began to splash the king with water, until these words broke forth from that man’s breast: “I give thanks to the Eternal Lord, the Controller of Glories, for the riches which I look upon here, that I was able to win them for my followers before the day of my demise. From now on you, Wiglaf, must attend to the people’s needs, for I can stay here no longer. Have them, after the burning, build a splendid mound on the headland by the ocean; it shall rise up as a monument, high on Whale’s Ness, and travellers from far-off places will afterwards call it ‘Beowulf’s Barrow’. Hard hand-play will not be denied to any warring sea-farer who makes an attempt on our home.”

The bold-minded chieftain took the golden ring-collars from his neck, presented it along with his decorated helmet, his bracelet and his byrnie to his trusty thegn, Wiglaf—bade him use them well. “You are the last of our tribe—fate has swept away all the rest of my kin. I must after them.” These were the aged man’s final words before the soul went forth from his body.

The young spear-fighter took it very badly when he saw his most worshipful lord at his life’s end. The terrible dragon lay dead—and yet Beowulf had paid for the noble treasures with his own life. It was not long afterwards that those late to the battle, the ten faint-hearted trust-breakers together, came forth out of the wood, they who had previously not dared to back up their master in his time of need; now, ashamed, they bore their shields to where the grizzled old hero lay dead. They looked at Wiglaf, who sat by the Geat-ruler’s shoulder, trying to revive him without any success.

Overcome with regret, Wiglaf spoke darkly to those who had lost their courage: “Well, he who will talk truly may say that the leader who gave you the war-gear in which you stand there—battle-garments of the most splendid kind that he
could find far or near—had entirely thrown away the equipment. The nation’s king had no reason whatsoever to boast about his comrades-in-arms. I myself could give him little protection in the fight; yet nonetheless I endeavoured—quite beyond my measure—to help my kinsman.

“So much the weaker was the deadly foe when I assailed him with my sword: the fire flowed less strongly from his head. Too few defenders, though, thronged about their lord when the hardship befell him. Now the giving of rings and of swords must cease for your race—and claims of land-right by the clansmen come to nothing, once far-off princes hear of your flight. To every warrior, death is better than a life of disgrace.”

39 Beowulf loses his life, and Geatland, with no-one left to rule it, is absorbed into the larger (modern-day) state of Sweden. There are several reasons why Wiglaf cannot be king; he is half Swedish; he has no strong band of retainers; and he is even further from the male line of royalty than his uncle has been. He, also, will have to bury the treasure in order to keep it safe. He is, in effect, the new ‘Lone Survivor’, destined like the other (and indeed like all such others on the collapse of the gift-hall) to die forlorn and friendless.

Part IX: A Renewed Threat

Then Wiglaf sent someone to announce the outcome of the battle to the remainder of the band of shield-bearers, who had sat the morning long in the enclosure, waiting for one of two things—the loss or the return of their lord. The messenger spoke truthfully to them as a body: “The leader of the Geats now lies fast on his death-bed, on account of the worm’s deeds. Beside him sleeps the eternal enemy, slain by the dagger—for with his own sword Beowulf could not inflict any kind of injury on the fiend.

“At this very moment, Wiglaf sits by his side, the living warrior keeping watch over the dead one, sorrowing greatly over what lies ahead. From now on, the people can expect a time of conflict, once the news of the king’s fall becomes evident to the Franks and the Frisians. (Hygelac brought about the quarrel with them when he led a ship-army into Frisian lands. But outnumbered there, he fell amongst his troop, won no ornaments for his loyal followers.)

“And neither can I hope for any degree of friendship or fidelity from the Swedes, for it is widely known that Ongentheow took the life of Hathclyn Hrethling near Raven’s Wood, cut him down, rescued the aged woman, his wife of former years, bereft of gold—the noble lady of the Geats, Onela’s mother and Ohthere’s. It is also known that he was set upon in reply by the forces of Hygelac. He drew back behind the earth-wall, not trusting that he might defend the hoard, child, and wife against the war-voyagers.
“Indeed, that place of refuge was soon overrun by Hygelac’s standards, and the grey-haired old Swede brought to bay by the edges of swords. Two hardy thegns hewed him down, carried bride and armour to the Geatish king, who accepted those treasures most graciously and promised them prodigious rewards. And so he fulfilled his vow: to them both he gave land and rings, to one of them the hand of his only daughter in matrimony.

“That is the feud and the hatred, the deadly persecution of men, for which I expect that the Swedish people will come seeking us newly, when they learn that our lord has lost his life—he who earlier held hoard and kingdom against those who hated us. Stripped of fortune, sad at heart, our troop will have to tread an alien land—now that the leader of the armies has given up earthly joys.

“Yonder lies a store of treasure, untold gold hard won. Not just a single share shall melt away with the gallant one. Rather, the fire shall consume it all, the flames swallow it up—no brave warrior to wear a precious thing in remembrance, no fair maiden to have a ring-adornment about her neck.

“No more shall the minstrel praise the fighters in the hall, but the raven, ever ready for robbery, shall boast of his very own deeds on the field—tell the eagle how he sped at the feast

40 Hyrel’s sister is used as a pawn in the game of politics—but only while she is in the possession of the Swedes does their alliance with the Geats remain intact. Thus, she is captured by the Geats with her original dower of gold; recaptured by her husband, Ongentheow; without it; and then conveyed back to her own people when he is killed. She later appears at Beowulf’s funeral, saying that she expects the strife to be renewed yet again. It is she and her first-born son, Othere, who are being guarded so closely at Ravenswood. And it is the slaying of Ongentheow that pleases Hygelac most. There is really no telling, though, how many other battles might have been fought over her, if we look at the figurative side of the story and not just the historical one.

41 Herein may lie the final clue to the Riddle of the Firedrake—for the mighty destroyer has not been shown to have shed the blood of any man before Beowulf, and the only feudal vengeance said to have been taken by the Geatish king (for the death of a person) is his attack on Onela. But Onela has put an end to Heordred and openly applauded the murder of Emmund—and Beowulf first supports the dynastic aspirations of Emmund’s younger brother, Eadgils, and then takes the necessary revenge on the Swede-king for the death of his uncle’s son.

when, with the wolf, he plundered the remains of the dead. Now, though, we must go to our king and bring him, our ring-giver, on his way to the funeral pyre.”

Then the entire company rose up—went tearfully to the place of Beowulf’s death. They found him lifeless on the strand—and opposite him the detestable worm, fifty feet in length. The gruesome being had made his last use of earth-caverns—indeed it was evident that the venture had not brought any gladness to the one who had kept the splendid things in under the rampart without right. The barrow-ward had previously slain a man amongst men: then was the feud savagely avenged.

Wiglaf spoke, son of Weohstan: “The hoard, grimly-gotten, has been examined. I have been inside and looked all around at the treasures of the building. In haste, I seized a mighty load of the piled-up wealth and brought it out here to the light. Before he died, our lord commanded me to have you raise a barrow at the site of the pyre—high, great and glorious. Now let us make haste and look at the heap of priceless goods for a second time. I will show you the way. Then, when we come out, let the bier be made ready, and let us transport our distinguished leader to the place where he must dwell in the keeping of the Almighty.”

The bold hero then ordered them to bring wood for the fire. He also called together seven of the king’s thegns, the noblest
ones—land-holders all—and they went together, in under the enemy roof, the one at the front bearing a fiery torch in his hand. Indeed, they had no hesitation in taking the treasure, now that it lay there unguarded and wasting in the chamber. The dragon himself they shoved over the escarpment, let the waves take him, the lapping flood embrace the proud guardian of the trappings. Then was the twisted gold laden onto a wagon, along with numerous other things, and the grey-headed battle-warrior, Beowulf, borne to Whale’s Ness.42

Then, as had been Beowulf’s wish, the Geats prepared the pyre, hung all about with helmets, battle-shields, and bright byrmies. In the midst of it the grieving warriors laid their exalted leader, their most eminent lord. Then on the headland they began to kindle the greatest of funeral fires; the woodsmoke rose up black above the blaze—the flames roaring and the onlookers weeping—until the heat had broken Beowulf’s bone-house. Cheerless, the men bewailed the death of their monarch.

Likewise, the Geatish woman sang a song full of woe, said over and again that she feared for herself days full of grief, many a slaughter, the terror of an army, humiliation and capture. Heaven swallowed the smoke.

Then the people of the Weders fashioned on the cape a mound which was high and broad, and obvious far and wide to wave-travellers, and within ten days they had completed the memorial to their leader, that man most defiant in war. Into the barrow they placed rings and brooches, and all such other ornaments and emblems as they had earlier taken from the hoard. They let the earth keep the treasure of warriors, and there it remains yet, the gold in the dust.43

Then the bold-spirited ones, sons of earls, twelve all told, rode around the grave, mourning their king. They composed a lament for him, paid homage to his heroism and the courage of his deeds. In this way did the men of the Geats, the companions of the hearth, bewail the fall of their friendly lord: they said that he, of all the world’s rulers, was the mildest and most courteous of men, the leader most kindly to his followers, and the one most eager for glory.

42 The wormish slaughterer—that venomous creature who has killed in Geatland—is pushed over the bluff as an indication of his total destruction. Beowulf, however, will have an earthwork raised to him on a promontory by the ocean, as a grave reminder to enemies around and about that the kings of his land are both good and warlike. Nonetheless, there will be a fresh contest between the Swedes and the Geats—for Eadgils, the new young Swedish king, still has a measure of claim on the neighbouring Geatish throne. A covetous man will invariably repay kindliness with treachery.

43 Here, the reburied hoard awaits one of two things: the coming of another dragon, or the arrival of a new king, who will take up the banner and use the rings to establish and to maintain his troop. That is its very nature—wealth put by for future use. And it is significant that the quarrel over the woman may also be ‘dug up’ once more. Interdynastic rivalries are not often moderated by way of marriage.
GLOSSARY

abode  a dwelling or dwelling-place
ale   a drink similar to beer
ale-cup a beer-mug
alien  foreign, or (of persons only) exiled
arm-ring / armlet a thick metal bracelet, worn as armour or as decoration
armour- / breast-net that part of a mail-coat, made from a ‘netting’ of iron rings, which covers the arms, shoulders and flanks
attendant a man with a duty of care to a superior
bane   a murderer
banner  a flag used as a monument to the leader of a race or as a symbol of the rights to a throne
bard   a poet of the king’s court; a man whose role it is to sing the praises of king or of guest at the feast-table
barrow a grave-mound
bastion a fortification, or defensive post
battle-brand a war-sword
battle- / war-gear equipment for use in the fight
battle-prize a trophy won in war
battle-shaft a spear or javelin
battle-standard / -banner / standard an insignia used to point out the battle-power of a particular nation
battle-trapping / trapping an item won, or stolen, in war
battle-worthy having a proven reputation as a fighter
bear-sark a battle-garment made from the skin of a bear; literally, a ‘bear-shirt’
bench-boards the wooden planks of which a ‘mead-bench’ is made; the benches themselves
bereft of gold deprived or, literally, ‘robbed’, of one’s dowry
berserker a frenzied, and very courageous, warrior
bide   to wait or remain
bier   a platform on which a dead body is laid before burial
bill   a sword
billowing swelling
billows a body of troubled water
blade the cutting edge of a sword; the part of a sword below the handle; the sword itself
boar-crest a helmet topped with the images of swine
body-sark / sark a suit of armour
bolster a long, narrow cushion or pillow
bondsman / thrall / vassal a servant or slave
bone-house the body’s bone-frame, or skeleton
booty plunder; the spoils of war
bosom the innermost part of something; figuratively, the breast
boss the central node of a shield
brain-pan the skull
brand a flashing sword; fire or flame
breast-plate / -armour a metal covering for the chest
brim-wolf a water-wolf
brooches metal clasps, used as clothing-fasteners
brute a loathsome, animalistic creature
buckler a shield
building / hall-building a dwelling constructed as a sign of superiority, as a reward for service, or as a symbol of individual rights
burb a fortified town, burg, or borough
burnished lustrous, or polished
Cain in the Bible, the first son of Adam and Eve, who was driven by God into the barren land to the East of Eden for the murder of his brother, Abel
caitiff a base or cowardly person
candle of the sky the sun
ceape a headland or promontory
chamber an enclosed room, a vault
champion a paid fighter; the very best of soldiers
chieftain the leader of a tribe; a war-lord
chieftaincy the headship of a country
churl a mean-spirited or ill-bred person
citizens those who live in towns, or cities
clan members of the same family or social group
cliff a bank of rocks
companion / comrade a fellow-warrior; a brother-in-arms

company a band of companions or kinsmen
consort a marriage-partner
coselet a piece of armour which covers the top part of the body
councilors a body of wise men, advisors to the king
counsellor a man who gives advice (on things such as tactics and diplomacy)
court the abode of a king
courtly courteous, courtly, or well-bred
courtesy deference or favour, such as is shown to men within the ‘court’
crag a steep and rugged rock
cunning clever, skilful, or sly
cups drinking-mugs, passed to (or amongst) the fighting men during the feast
deal out to dispense gifts to one’s followers
decorated adorned with metals such as iron or gold
deeds of arms the practice of warfare
deprived of joys / joyless stripped of possessions or privileges or fortune; downcast, desolate, or cheerless
dint a blow or sword-stroke
dis-courteous un-courteously, or ill-bred
distinguished famous
dole-some mournful, or full of grief
dominion the area controlled by one ruler
doughty hardy, or resolute
dowry the money, privileges and rights which a woman brings from her father to her husband, as part of a marriage-agreement
drinking-cup / -vessel a symbol of unity, in that it is shared between related warriors and/or new-found friends; more literally, an ale- or mead-cup
dwell to live, remain, or wait
dwelling a house, home, castle, or other place of residence
ducal a powerful land-holder; a nobleman second only in rank to a king
ducal the estates governed by an earl
duchy the area of the world properly held by humans
ducal / duchess the headship of a country
earth-fortress / -hall / -cave a fortification or dwelling, built under the earth
earth-wall a rampart made of piled-up earth
earth-work a burial-mound
edge a sword; the edge(s) of a sword or knife
Beowulf & the Battle-Beasts of Yore

enclosure an encampment which is surrounded by a defensive wall
estranged alienated
exile a state of exile; an area outside of the civilised world; a person cast out from the company of the court
fastness a stronghold or fortress, either natural or man-made
fatherland a person’s native land; the land of one’s fathers
feat a remarkable exploit
fen an area of low-lying, swampy land
feud / quarrel an ongoing fight between rival or neighbouring clans, occasioned by things such as greed, manslaughter, or the loss of one’s rights; a personal vendetta, necessitated by an act of treachery
feudal relating to a feud or quarrel
fidelity faithfulness such as is required under the terms of an oath of loyalty or peace
field a battlefield
fiend a demon or devil; an enemy
fifer one who plays a pipe
fire-drake a fire-breathing dragon
firstling a first-born son
flood a large body of water; the sea
fold the earth’s heartland
fold-building an edifice situated at the centre of the world
fold-dwellers a group of persons who inhabit the middle-earth
fray a quarrel or fight; a clash of arms
friend a gold-giver, or lord; an ally
friends men who are in harmony with each other
friendship the loyalty which follows the giving of gifts by a king; a compromise over a kingdom; an agreement between men, or nations, which leads to the sharing of power; a treaty between men who were once enemies
giant a man of great stature or superior military prowess; a very strong enemy
gift a present or, less commonly, a bribe
gift-giver a king
gift-stool / -throne the source of gifts; the seat of a king’s power; literally, a stool or a throne
gifts presents of armour, equipment and jewellery, given by a king to his men, in exchange for promises of support in war
golden embroidered with gold thread
gladdness happiness, or joy
godless heathen
gold-house a rich, or richly-decorated, castle
greedy eager for blood
grizzled having grey hair
habitation a dwelling-place
hall / ring- / gift- / gold-hall the king’s court or fortress or castle; a building from which gifts and treasures are distributed
hall-guest a visitor who comes to the hall (as often as not, with murderous intent)
hall-rulers those men who hold sway in the middle-earth
hall-thegn a warrior who resides in the hall
hall-troop a host of men entrusted with the job of guarding the hall
hand-spur a talon or claw
hand-troop a group of hand-picked warriors
hart a male deer; a symbol of the Christian religion
headland / promontory a tongue of land which juts out into a sea or a lake; symbolically, a political border
hearth the fireplace, which represents the central part of the hall
hearth-companions the members of the king’s troop closest to him by age, experience, or kinship
heathen un-Christian, sinful, or devilish
Heatho-bards the clan led by Ingeld—a lesser offshoot of the ‘Longo-bard’ tribe, which was ruled by Scyld before his descendants came to be known (via his son, Scyld) as the ‘Scyld-ing’s’; literally, the ‘War-bards’

the Heavenly Father / the Lord / the Almighty / the Creator / the Provider / the King of Glory / the Father / the Ruler of Men the various terms used to refer to God
heaven’s gem the sun
helm a leader (or the leadership) of men; a helmet
helmsman one who takes the leadership
henchman a loyal or dedicated supporter
hide a measure of land between 60 and 120 acres in size
hie hurry
high-settle a seat stationed above the others in the hall—a word used figuratively to signify the court
hilt / haft the handle of a sword
hoard  a stockpile of money, rings or treasure; the treasury of a kingdom; the symbol of a king's power

hoard-keeper  one who keeps the treasure-pile safe, or away from others

hoary  having hair the colour of hoar, or frost

home-stead  a residence or dwelling-place

horn-gabled / antlered  having an ornamental gable in the likeness of a pair of hart's horns

host  a band of armed men

house / household  a building; a ruling dynasty

insignia  a flag used as the sign of a nation

iron  a sword, or the material from which it is made

joy  the comfort/s of the hall; the companionship of men; prosperity

keel  a ship

kind / kindly  generous, or respectful

kindness / kindliness  respect such as is usually shown only to one's own kindred

kinsman  a blood-relation

knoll  a hillock or incline

land-dwellers  a society of kinsmen living on the land as opposed to the water

land-holders  men who have received large estates by royal grant

landsmen  those who hold the land

leaderless  under the control of various tribal lords, rather than the one king

levies  taxes paid to a military overlord

life-fee / fee  a payment made to kinsmen as compensation for a murder—the acceptance of which is a less honourable option than the getting of vengeance

lind  a shield made from the wood of the linden, or lime, tree

literary etiquette  the rules governing the composition of Anglo-Saxon poetry—such as the use of word-equivalence, and of predetermined patterns of verse-linkage

lith  a force of sea-going warriors

lith-man  one of a band of ship-men

loathsomely  hateful

lord  a king; the leader of men

lordling  a younger or lesser lord, whose gift-hall may be somewhat inferior to that of the king

lough  a lake, or 'loch'

magnificent  of superior, or kingly, worth

mail-coat / coat of mail / mail  a suit of armour

maletactor  a wrong-doer

Man  one of the Race of Men

Mankind / Men  members of the Human Race; God's chosen ones

march-stepper  one who roams the borderslands or 'marches', i.e., those areas of a country which are of disputed ownership

mead  a sweet wine, made from honey and spices

mead-benches  tables or seats within the 'mead-hall'

mead- / beer- / wine-hall / ale- / mead-house  the place where warriors eat, drink, speak bold words about their exploits, and are entertained by music and poetry—and where they usually sleep

measure  (n.) that which is obligatory, or fitting; a man's degree of excellence

mercenaries / conscripts  men who fight, for a price, in the service of the king

mere  a lake or other similar body of water

mettlesome  brave or valiant

middle-earth  the territory held by an overking; an area of inhabited territory which is encompassed by sea or by wasteland

minstrel  a musician, singer, or bard

miscrett  a villain or wrong-doer

moor  a tract of open ground covered with coarse vegetation

mound  a large heap of soil piled up over a grave- or cremation-site

naked blade  an unsheathed blade

necklace / circle / ring-collar  a collar made from interwoven strands of metal, designed to withstand the blows of a sword

ness  a headland

Old English  the language spoken in England between the fifth and the eleventh centuries

Origin of Men / Creation-song  the story of the founding of the world and of Man's placement within it

ornament  something which enhances one's stature; symbolically, a woman

outlander  one who lives outside of God's chosen land

outlaw  someone who lives beyond the rules of the society of men

patterned blade  a sword blade made by folding the metal when forging, giving the blade extra strength and resulting in patterning in the metal

peace-pledge  a woman given in marriage so as to weave peace between two countries
people  a group of persons who are related to each other; a nation; a ruling tribe
people's foe  the opponent of Mankind
peoples  the different races of the world
pernicious  deadly
plain  an area of flat land; a field of battle
plated sword  a iron sword, decorated with gold
poet  a singer or storyteller
prince  a word used, variously, to describe a king or leader of a tribe, or a king's son; more generally, an earl or a very valorous man
princely  noble or well-born
prince's throne  figuratively, a position which, although royal, is a lesser one than that held by the king himself
principality / pridedom  the area ruled either by a king or by a 'prince'
prize  a gift given to a man after he has performed well
pyre  a funeral fire
rampart  a defensive wall, either natural or man-made
raven  a 'ravenous' (or 'robbing') bird, which is said to feed on dead bodies
ravenging / ravenous  predatory or voracious
recognise  to perceive; to acknowledge as king
relic / keepsake / remnant / heirloom  a valuable item such as sword, meant to be handed down from father to son, but sometimes given to, or taken by, another
retainer / liege-man  the follower of a king or prince; one who pledges allegiance to his master in return for payment
ring-adornment  a decorative neck-lace
ring-dealer / -giver  one who hands out 'rings' or other valuables to his retainers
ring-iron  the iron rings out of which chain-mail is made
ring-prow  having a prow in the shape of a (ring-)kniled serpent
rings  arm- and neck-rings, made so as to protect a warrior in battle
roof  a structure which forms the top part of a building; a shelter for men
runic  relating to runes, the letters of the alphabet (or futhore) used by the ancient Germanic peoples
sail-road  the sea
sayings  words, or expressions
scarp / escarpment  a steep slope or bank, either natural or man-made
scatter  one who does harm

scourge  one who causes destruction
sea  a word used to refer either to the ocean, or to an inland sea or lake
sea-board  the side, or border, of the sea
sea-farer / sea-voyager  a man who makes voyages on the sea
sea-flood  the Deluge
sea-king  a man who rules on land, but also leads a number of armed shipsmen
sea-raider  an ocean-going bandit, forced to act as a pirate after being banished from his homeland
sea-shore  the water-side
sea-traveller  a ship
sea-wood  a ship made of planks
settlement  literally, the place where the 'high-settle' is to be found
set upon  to grab or seize
shady / shadowy  dark, or not easily recognised
shieldsmen / shield-fighter / -companion  one entrusted with the job of keeping the 'shield-wall' intact
shield-wall  a mesh of interlocked shields, used as a defence against arrows and other weapons
ship-army  a band of hostile sea-farers
shirt of mail / limb- / mail-shirt  a coat of chain-mail
sire  a father
slumber  to lie sleeping
smith  a forger of metals
song  singing, or story-telling, or the retelling of old stories
Spear- / Ring- / West- / South- / North- / East-Danes  the different terms used to describe the Danish people
sped  prospered
spiteful  vicious, or venomous
'spoiler  one who causes harm to others, or in fact 'despoils' them
stalwart  courageous, or robust
stark  uncompromising, or resolve
steed  a fast or spirited horse
strand  a sea-beach or other sandy shore
strange  alien, or unusual
stranger  a foreigner, or other unknown creature
strong-armed  having great military strength
stronghold  a castle; the quantity of land which is held according to one's strength
swan-road  the sea
swart  dark
thirstily  eagerly, or craving blood
treasure-decked  adorned with riches, or well-supplied with battle-gear
treasure-house  a structure containing a store of riches
treasure /-s  valuables such as money, or jewels, or war-gear; priceless or costly items
treasured  precious, or decorated with jewels
tribute  money, or deference, paid to an over-king
troop  a force of fighting-men whose skills and prowess are proved over the course of many years
troop-master  a man who teaches young soldiers how to fight and behave honourably
trooper  a member of the 'troop'
trouble /-s  misery; warfare
twisted gold  ornaments (or perhaps even armaments) made out of interlaced strands of gold
unhappy  having no good fortune
unnatural  forsaking the laws of nature or of kinship
Val-halla  literally, the 'hall' of the 'slain warriors'
vaulted  having an arched roof, or containing a strongroom in which to store valuables
victory-brand  a victorious sword
viper  any kind of poisonous, serpentine thing
visor  the part of a helmet which covers the face, or the helmet itself
visored helmet  a helmet with a protective face-piece
wall  the wall of a building; a barrier of earth or stone; figuratively, a 'shield-wall'
war-byrnie / byrnie  a suit of armour, made from interlocked metal rings and overlapping metal plates, worn to protect a person in battle
war-flame /-steel  a battle-sword
war- / battle- / hild- / shield- / hand-play  the game of war; war-fare in general
wardsman  a guardian or warden (written in compounds as 'ward')
wave-travellers  hostile shipmen, or those who travel by sea
Weder-Geats / Weders / War- / Sea-Geats  the different names used to tell of the Geatish people
wend  to go by turning, or to turn away from
wight  a man; a human being
whale's road  the sea
woeful  deprived of worldly prosperity, or full of woe
worshipful  honourable
wretch  an unhappy or unlucky creature
wretched  miserable, unfortunate, or of bad breeding