

The Tale Of Mighty Beowulf



Here, let me tell you of the time Hrothgar, king of Denmark, built a hall in his castle. When it was complete, he named it Heorot. Heorot was a hall where the people in the palace ate supper and then slept when it was time for bed.



Nearby there lived a beast who lurked in the dark. He was called Grendel, and was grand and gruesome. Grendel abhorred Heorot (no one knows why); one night he went to the hall, broke through a wall, and found many men to feast on. Grendel growled ferocious and loud, and his red eyes glared in the dark. The noise awoke all who slept in the hall and the knights were poised for battle. But the beast Grendel showed his horrible teeth and grabbed the first knight he found and gnashed him with one big bite. The monster roared and everyone ran, leaving Grendel loudly laughing as he went back to his lair where he soundly slept.



The monster managed to raid Heorot for eleven years. Finally it became clear King Hrothgar needed help killing the beast in battle, because his warriors were dying one by one in this gruesome Grendel War. The Danes prayed to the gods to keep the monster from preying on them.

Their prayers were answered when a ship sailed to their shores. Beowulf was aboard the boat, and he came from across the sea to help Hrothgar from the terror of Grendel's teeth. Beowulf announced himself to Hrothgar, and the King welcomed him with open arms. Hrothgar fed his guest a feast in his hall, and Beowulf announced he planned to fight Grendel with his fists. Unferth, Hrothgar's bravest knight, questioned Beowulf's skill. Unferth asked, "Are you the legendary Beowulf, who took part in a swimming contest with a friend in the ocean? As I have heard the story, you both challenged each other and the sea for seven nights, swimming as far out as you could, beating the cold and angry waves, but in the end your friend won the race, you fell behind humiliated." Beowulf bawked. "You're right brave Unferth, I am that Beowulf.



But you have heard wrong. For five days and nights
we swam shoulder to shoulder against those cold and angry waves.

I was pulled under by a sea-monster. Armed with a sword,
I killed the sea-monster and eight others after it. It was a hard fight
under water with those terrible beasts, and I was weakened
but I swam to the surface and made it to the other shore.
Not since my fight with the sea-monsters have my people perished
at the mouths of them. I lost, but I was honored, not humiliated."



When the feast was over, it was bedtime for the brave
Beowulf. He laid in bed awake, waiting for Grendel to strike.
Grendel stormed through the stone wall, grabbed
a startled soldier with his cruel claws and bit him to the bone.
The monster moved toward Beowulf, and lifted him
out of bed.

But before the beast could open its mouth,
Beowulf put Grendel in an arm lock no man or beast
had ever witnessed, and the monster let out a horrible howl.
The two tumbled about the hall until the sound of the scream
from the loser lifted everyone out of their beds. The monster
had been manacled from a man stronger than him,
and the beast ran recklessly back to his den to die.
Grendel's arm was torn off by Beowulf's grasp and
he could not live much longer. Beowulf picked the arm off
the floor, evidence of the fight, and stood among his men victorious.



The next day word got around that the beast had been beaten
by Beowulf. The damaged wall in the hall was repaired,
and Hrothgar gave Beowulf gifts for his courage.
A victory feast was served for supper, and everyone
was the happiest they'd been since Grendel started
running his raids. That night as they settled in for sleep,
it felt great to not worry about Grendel again.
Beowulf went to bed elsewhere. But as soon as
everyone was asleep and silence swept the night,
a second terror lurked in the moonlight.

Grendel's mother had come to Heorot to avenge her son's death.
She was just as gruesome as Grendel. The sleeping were startled
awake, and they all went for their swords. Grendel's mother
killed a counselor, Hrothgar's right-hand man. She grabbed
Grendel's arm, gave an angry growl, and disappeared.

After her attack, Beowulf was brought to Hrothgar's hall. The crowd in the castle knew Grendel's mother lived under the mere, so Beowulf decided to go to her instead of waiting for her to come back to him. He brought a boat to the wet mere, even though the waters were infested with all sorts of beasts. He took a crew with him, and on their way, through the dark moor, they found her footprints, and followed them to the water.



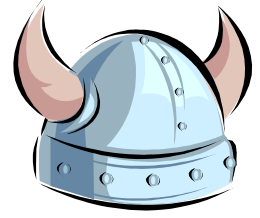
In the water and on the rocks they found reptiles of all kinds: they found snakes and sea-dragons, monsters and wild things. They waded through them to where Grendel's mother lived below the waters. Beowulf wore a wet suit and prepared for battle. A special sword was given to him by Hrothgar's men, and he placed it in his holster. Beowulf told the men to wait for him; he would be back victorious. With that, he dove into the deep waters, and descended to the monster's den.

Grendel's mother sensed Beowulf approaching. She waited for him, hungry. When he came close, she captured him and dragged him down to her den. Beowulf searched for the special sword, heaved it out of his holster, and struck his opponent. But the sword failed to do damage. The blade broke off the handle and Beowulf was left using his two bare hands. He attempted another arm lock, but the beast's strength was too brutal. Beowulf managed to break free, and fought bare-handed against the furry beast. But Beowulf's bare hands were no match for the monster's might. And for a moment he thought he had lost. Right then, Beowulf saw a mighty weapon, a sword of some sort, hanging on the cave wall, glistening with gold. He raised the heavy sword and with one swift blow Beowulf killed the beast. As he stopped to rest, he realized Grendel himself laid in the lair, lifeless. His arm was placed neatly next to him by his mother. Beowulf grabbed Grendel's arm, and swam back to the surface of the water, leaving his special sword in the lair.



Beowulf returned to Hrothgar and told the king Heorot was free once again of those monsters in the night. Hrothgar thanked Beowulf, praised his strength and courage, but warned him that his strength and courage could also endanger his life. "Do not give way to pride,"

said Hrothgar to Beowulf, "your strength is in bloom,
but blossoms only a short while. Grendel was king
of this country for eleven years, even though
I wore the crown, because I didn't bring my pride to battle
against him. I knew better. I laid low instead, and prayed
for someone with courage to fight him. The day you arrived
on my shores I knew my prayers were answered.
I say this because you are fit to be King, and will be, someday."
Beowulf thanked him for the fatherly advice, and told him
it was time to sail the seas again, to go back home.



He gathered his men, prepared his ship, and said goodbye
to Hrothgar and Heorot. When Beowulf and his ship arrived
at shore, he was welcomed at once by his Uncle Hygelac.
Hygelac was king of this country, ruler of the Geats.
He ruled the Geats well, and years later when Hygelac
died of old age, Beowulf himself became king.
For fifty years Beowulf ruled his kingdom well,
but in his old age, Beowulf was faced with another terror
of the night.



A dragon, which lived in a cave on a nearby cliff,
awoke angry, because someone came into his cave
while he soundly slept, and stole some treasure
off his treasure pile. It happened not once, but twice.
The dragon found footprints the second time,
and he flew over the kingdom like a living torch,
burning buildings down to their bones.
Beowulf believed the dragon performed these deeds
because of something he had done. So the king
decided to fight the dragon himself. He gathered
an army of men and made for the cave, the dragon's den.

With his men waiting outside, Beowulf entered
the cave and called for the dragon, who responded
with a breath of fire. Beowulf, the old king,
raised his shield and sword and the two battled.
The heat inside the cave made it hard for the old king
to focus. He stabbed the dragon's scales with his sword,
and the dragon cried in pain. But the puncture
wasn't deep enough, and it upset the dragon even more.
Outside the army heard its cry, and all but one ran
for safety. Only Wiglaf ran inside the cave to help
Beowulf, who was fighting without his sword.
The dragon turned and sunk its teeth into Beowulf's neck.



The dragon focused on Beowulf so the battle was easier for young and strong Wiglaf, who gave the dragon a deadly blow. The dragon cried in pain once again, blew his last fiery breath, and fell hard on the floor.

Wiglaf ran to Beowulf's aid, and attempted to treat his wound. "Wiglaf," said Beowulf, "bring me some treasure, so I can see what I've been fighting for." Wiglaf ran around the fallen dragon, and fetched a piece of treasure, something simple he could carry. Beowulf's eyes fell on it. "Ah," he said, "Wiglaf, I name you the new king of the Geats, you have shown your courage. I will die of my wound." And soon, the old king closed his eyes, breathed his last breath, and peacefully passed away.

